

PEACE AND JUSTICE:  
AN EXPLORATION OF ECUMENICAL  
AND PROCESS THOUGHT  
AND INTERPRETATION IN PREACHING

A PROFESSIONAL PROJECT

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DEE EISENHAUER

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Dee Eisenhower,  
has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty  
of the School of Theology at Claremont in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

### *Faculty Committee*

John B. Cobb Jr.  
John C. Beaman

April 4, 1985  
Date

Joseph C. Hecox  
Dean

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## ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the interrelatedness of justice and peace in the world today, the theological underpinnings of such an understanding of justice and peace, and the interpretation of this vision or viewpoint in preaching.

The first chapter is an introduction to a concern for peace from the perspective of a Christian in the United States and a critique of action that is aimed only at avoidance of nuclear war. The concept of peace with justice from the World Council of Churches' (WCC) perspective is introduced, along with Process theology as a theological perspective, and preaching is suggested as a mode of communication for the church.

Chapter 2 explores the history of the linkage between peace and justice in ecumenical (mostly WCC) literature. WCC materials are used to provide a global Christian perspective on these issues.

Chapter 3 examines five theological issues that are important in the Christian discussion of justice and peace. These are the nature of God; human power and responsibility; the Kingdom of God (including hope and eschatology); sustainability; and dialogue. The traditional stance on these issues (here represented by the WCC) is compared with the process theology view.

The fourth chapter addresses the difficulties and opportunities involved in preaching on social justice

issues and includes a sermon which attempts to communicate the kind of vision outlined in the earlier chapters.

The fifth chapter concludes and comments on the whole project.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Peace is justice. Justice is peace. These very simple statements represent a complicated reality in the world that may well transform the way Christians in the United States (U. S.) see themselves as peacemakers.

Peace has become a vital concern to millions of people in the past few years. We are living in the nuclear shadow, and the possibility that the planet will perish in a nuclear holocaust has become increasingly ominous. Voices are heard from all sectors of the population warning of the danger we are in.

Physicians say that there will be virtually no medical resources to cope with a full-scale nuclear attack. Most hospitals and doctors are concentrated in central city areas which will be destroyed. The physicians left, even if they were not wounded themselves, would have such a heavy caseload that it would be days before they could see all the seriously wounded even for a short time. Medical supplies and drugs would be difficult to obtain since communication and transportation systems would be decimated.

Civil defense experts say that there is no real civil defense against a nuclear attack. There is no hiding place. Bomb shelters would become ovens, burning alive anyone who took refuge there. The extremely short warning time (it takes only thirty minutes for an intercontinental

missile to travel from the U.S. to the Soviet Union or vice versa, and less time is needed for submarine-launched missiles or cruise missiles positioned close to either nation's border) makes evacuation of a city impossible. Even if it were possible, there is evidence that nuclear fallout and changes in weather from the fallout would affect the entire world.

Scientists concur in saying that there is no defense. Militarily, there is no defence system that could possibly prevent every incoming missile from reaching its target. The space-based weapons currently being researched would be relatively inaccurate, extremely expensive, and vulnerable to attack themselves. A recent Omni article offered evidence that it is now possible to launch materials in the direction opposite of the earth's orbit, and even a truckload of sand so launched would travel at a high speed capable of destroying anything in its path, e.g. satellites in a regular orbital pattern. (1) Scientists have also recently discovered a phenomenon called the "nuclear winter", which means that there would be so much dust and fallout in the air that sunlight could not get through and temperatures may drop to below freezing worldwide for a period of years. All plant and animal life could die. Finally, scientists have discovered a phenomenon called EMF, which means that following the explosion of a nuclear device there would be a surge of energy through electrical wiring that would melt it, rendering ineffective all of our communication networks.



Even certain members of the military speak of the failure of deterrence as a defence policy; the impossibility of a limited nuclear war; the fact that any fallout from weapons we would explode would fall back on us; and the fact that military personnel could not function to control operations after a nuclear war started because communications would be impossible. (2)

H.J. Geiger has summarized the effects of nuclear war by saying that all activities such as adequate medical care "require an intact social fabric--not merely the infrastructure of electric power, transportation, communications, shelter, water or food but the social enterprises, the complex human interactions and organizations supported by that infrastructure. That social fabric is ruptured, probably irreparably, by even a single nuclear weapon." (3) It seems clear that the world as we know it would be utterly destroyed if we cannot somehow avoid a nuclear war.

It is no wonder, then, that the Christian church has taken this concern very seriously in recent history. Not all Christians, but a growing number, have spent a great deal of time and energy exploring what it means to be peacemakers in a world threatened by nuclear destruction. Books such as Dale Aukerman's Darkening Valley: A Biblical Perspective on Nuclear War and J. Carter Swaim's War, Peace and the Bible have proliferated as we explore biblical and theological bases for peacemaking. Educational materials such as Shirley J. Heckman's Peace is Possible and the

United Church of Christ's Peace Futuring are produced. Churches and church organizations take bold stands for peace: the National Conference of Catholic Bishops issues a pastoral letter on war and peace; the Claremont United Church of Christ, Congregational, takes a congregational vote in favor of a nuclear freeze; many mainline denominations issue statements on peace at their national meetings. Religious marches, meetings, and conferences on peace are organized all over the nation. For hundreds of thousands of Christians in the U.S., peacemaking has been accepted as part of their calling and has been given highest priority.

Few would argue that peacemaking is not an important concern in our world, given the possible consequences of a nuclear disaster. Few would argue that the churches' surge of interest and activity in this area is not a positive, hopeful sign. However, there are many that argue that a concern for peace is not enough in itself; peace cannot be isolated from other issues that confront us as Christians. The result of so much attention to nuclear issues may be that other important issues are overlooked.

Peace can be an exclusive concern if the focus is too narrow, i.e. only on the nuclear problem. The World Council of Churches (WCC), however, has shown how peace can be an all-inclusive concern if the focus is broadened to include justice, without which there is no real peace. What the WCC advocates is called "warm peace". They differentiate between this and the kind of "peacetime" we are in now:

Peace is more than the absence of war. The "cold" peace which is based on arms, on a balance of terror and on injustice, hunger, and poverty, needs to be replaced by the "warm" peace which is the absence of fear and incorporates justice, well-being, equality and sharing. (4)

This idea of a warm peace did not come about easily or haphazardly. It is the product of a struggle, not only the struggles of people whose lives are deeply affected by the lack of peace and justice in the world, but the struggle of persons with radically different perspectives and lifestyles to articulate together what it means to be a Christian today.

One of the greatest values of the ecumenical movement is that it provides a format for people to meet together and work out an understanding of such issues as peace and justice that represents many perspectives. The WCC and its related agencies frequently act as a conscience for Christians of the first world, reminding us of the pain in other parts of the world and of our responsibility to our brothers and sisters who are living with injustice we can barely comprehend. It is perfectly understandable that we would devote our attention as a church to the nuclear issue because it is so close to us personally. But this is not the only issue, and we are fortunate to be able to hear the perspectives of others.

In a speech to the 6th Assembly of the WCC, Allan Boesak addressed this issue of relating peace and justice, pointing out the "tensions" surrounding the issue of peace in the ecumenical movement. He spoke of the concern of

many Christians in the "third world" that "the issue of peace will be separated from the issue of justice, making of peace primarily a North Atlantic concern." (5) This should not happen because peace and justice are never separated in the Bible and because peace can only come about on an international level. He went on to say that justice issues are not easy to face but must be addressed anyway.

It may be true that the issues of justice, racism, hunger and poverty are largely unresolved issues for the ecumenical movement. It may be true that these issues present the churches with painful dilemmas, but it cannot be true that we will be willing to use the issue of peace to avoid these dilemmas. One cannot use the gospel to escape from the demands of the gospel. And one cannot use the issue of peace to escape from the unresolved issues of injustice, poverty, hunger and racism. If we do this we will make of our concern for peace an ideology of oppression which in the end will be used to justify injustice. (6)

This is a clear example of the kind of voice of conscience the WCC often provides for those of us in the first world churches.

The reasons for the WCC'S concern for justice are almost self-explanatory. Many of the member churches are representative of Christians in the third world. These are people who are living in conditions of staggering injustice. Recent statistics show that over half the people in the world live in countries with a per capita GNP of less than 600 U.S. dollars. Approximately one third of the world's population can not expect to live past the age of 50. At least 10 percent of the people in the world are severely malnourished, which may result in starvation or,

more often, hunger-related diseases which cause death. (7)  
In the richest countries, people die from over-eating (heart disease) while in the poorer countries, millions die from undernourishment. Susan George aptly states that hunger is not an unavoidable problem:

Today's world has all the physical resources and technical skills necessary to feed the present population of the planet or a much larger one. Unfortunately for the millions of people who go hungry, the problem is not a technical one--nor was it wholly so in the seventeenth century, for that matter. Whenever and wherever they live, rich people eat first, they eat a disproportionate amount of the food there is and poor ones rarely rise in revolt against this most basic of oppressions unless specifically told to "eat cake." Hunger is not a scourge but a scandal. (8)

There are many other scandals in the world besides hunger. People live with the consequences of racism, oppression, sexism, and violence with little hope of improving their situation. The WCC analyzes these problems and reminds those of us who not affected by them on a daily basis of the suffering of our sisters and brothers in other parts of the world.

One of the scandals in the world that the WCC deals with most effectively is closely related to peace. This is the problem of militarism in the world. The Council has studied the problem extensively and has shown that militarism is destructive not only in a direct way, i.e. people being killed in armed conflicts, but also indirectly. Overemphasis on national security breeds suspicion and hatred and distorts national priorities so that a disproportionate amount of money that could be spent on

such things as food and health care is spent on armaments. The poor once again suffer the brunt of this distortion of priorities; as one Christian minister has put it, "The bomb has already dropped on the poor." (9)

My motivation for doing this project on this topic rose out of my sense of the urgency of peacemaking in the world today. Along with my sense of urgency, however, arose a sense of hopelessness which I expect many of us who are concerned about peace experience. How can one approach an issue which is so complex, so large, and so out of control? I have had for a long time an amateur suspicion that the real impetus behind the arms race is economic, but have not had a very good handle on what that means specifically. The work of the WCC and its related agencies has provided a great deal of insight into the relatedness of peace and economic issues, of peace and justice. Even though in some ways understanding peace as interrelated with justice makes peacemaking a much more complex issue, I think this greater understanding can make our work as peacemakers more meaningful and more effective. The way to a peaceful world will be more easily accomplished if it is better understood.

I am using ecumenical literature as a major source of information for this project mainly because of its global perspective which enables first world Christians such as myself to understand better what is really happening in the world. As Dr. Dean Freudenberger has said, the ecumenical materials are valuable because they

"reflect, by and large, contemporary pre-occupations of a world-wide delegation of people seeking to represent faithfully their understanding of what it means to be a Christian in our time, and of the issues that 'hurt'. Ecumenical literature keeps independent reflections honest...in the context of dominating realities, i.e. war, injustice, pollution, etc." (10) The second chapter of this project will be devoted to a report of the history of WCC thinking about peace and how peace and justice came to be understood as inseparable issues.

The ecumenical literature, valuable though it is, has certain limitations. Dean Freudenberger urges students to understand that the reports of the WCC are usually developed by committees who must struggle faithfully to represent opposing points of view in a unified statement and often are working under time pressures. Thus they are not always as precise and well-thought out as they could be. I found this to be especially true with regard to the theological bases of the material. Because of the limitations I have mentioned it may not be fair to criticize the ecumenical writers for fuzziness in the theological concepts undergirding the Council's work, but it is fair to consider these concepts and to try to develop an understanding of them that will provide a solid faith base from which to proceed with our work. I have, then, identified several theological issues which seem to be important themes in the ecumenical material on peace and justice, and

which I will examine these from a different theological perspective, process theology.

Giving organized verbal expression to our faith is an important element of our action as faithful people. In the process perspective it is believed that human beings can experience truth and act out of that experience even if it is never brought to consciousness. However, when something does become conscious and coherent, it gains power in our lives.

The verbal expression of a universally experienced fact elicits a believing response in us because we had already apprehended the fact. The expression in verbal form simply helps us raise this apprehension into the clarity of consciousness, and hence make it possible for this apprehended element to become more important in our lives. It might even become the central element around which other elements might be organized. (11)

This is why I think it is important not to allow the theological bases of our action to remain fuzzy or even unstated. If we want to be faithful people, we must know what that faith around which we organize our lives is. I have chosen to approach the theological issues underlying the quest for peace and justice from the process perspective because it is for me a very liberating perspective. It is sensible; that is, it meshes with our "secular" beliefs about the world in a way more traditional theological perspectives oftentimes do not. It also seems more rational within itself than more traditional theology; there are not many gaps or "leaps of faith" or things labeled "mystery" within the system. Most importantly, it is a hopeful perspective, one that takes seriously the



possibility of novelty and change, which is necessary when we deal with deeply entrenched systems of conflict and injustice. The third chapter will be devoted to a discussion of some important theological issues from the process perspective.

The final problem for the church is not how accurately one theologian or a group of them might theorize or theologize about God and the world, but how effectively their work might be communicated so that the church can act in harmony with God's will. To this problem I devote my final chapter. I will examine some of the special difficulties and opportunities involved in preaching from a social and theological basis such as this "processed"-ecumenical-peace-and-justice stance. I will include a sermon of my own which will have been preached at a local church at which I was formerly employed. I will include an evaluation of the sermon by several members of the congregation and an evaluation by the preaching staff and several students from the School of Theology in order to measure its effectiveness.

I would at this point like to remind whatever readers I have that I am a student struggling to learn from these materials and not an expert in these matters. It is hoped that my learning will make me a more effective minister and will stimulate your thinking as well.

END NOTES

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CHAPTER II  
THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCEPT OF PEACE WITH JUSTICE  
IN ECUMENICAL LITERATURE

Peace and justice, taken separately or, more recently, taken together, have been major concerns of the World Council of Churches since its inception. As such, it is difficult to summarize its work on these issues; one is tempted to write a history of the Council and its related agencies organized around the quest for peace and justice. In the scope of this project, this would be impossible. Rather than attempting to write an inclusive history, then, I will highlight ecumenical statements that have to do with peace and justice in order to show how these concepts came to be tied so closely together. The chapter will end in a discussion of statements coming out of the 6th Assembly held at Vancouver in 1983 which specifically related peace to justice.

The author is aware that only reports of the assemblies and formal statements of the WCC Central Committee are official statements of the WCC and that even these are not formally binding upon member churches. However, it is important to examine other documents, reports of studies, consultations, and hearings because they "reflect other stages in the ecumenical process." (1) My particular interest in this paper is in a process, the process by which a body with global representation comes to identify and de-

fine important issues. Therefore I will make liberal use of documents other than official reports and statements by the Central Committee and the assemblies. I will generally refer to the source as "the WCC" and ask the reader to understand that this includes the non-official material under the ecumenical umbrella.

David Hoekema has written in a recent article that there are three basic stances the church can take with respect to society. These are chaplain, in which the church "provides a supportive and largely nonjudgemental presence within the societal structures as they exist"; pastor, whose purpose is "to respond to the needs of those whom it serves,...to provide the help which members which members need in grappling with the dilemmas and difficulties which they face"; and prophet, which sees its role in society as "the articulation of a clear and radical alternative to existing societal structures." (2) He sees the WCC fitting in the last of these categories, although its "concern with matters of political practicality tempers its idealism with realism and pragmatism." (3) This realism and pragmatism may shape the WCC role in a more pastoral way as the body strives to address the problems of real people who are speaking out of their own struggles. One can see the thinking of the Council change as its constituents change, as the body becomes more globally representative. Its statements are nearly always prophetic in some degree, but as time goes on they begin to sound more prophetic and less

pastoral to those of us in the wealthy nations. I believe this is because over time its pastoral concerns grow to include those whose "needs" are for radical change in societal structures.

In the beginning, the WCC was born out of several groups of mostly Western Christians who were devoted to social justice and world peace. Following WWI there was growing recognition of the need to unite as a worldwide church. A message from the Life and Work conference that preceeded the formation of the Council stated that "the sins and sorrows, the struggles and losses of the Great War and since, have compelled Christian churches to recognize, humbly and with shame, that the world is too strong for a divided church." (3) The concern for peace in the church was extended to a concern for peace in the world. If the church could transcend divisions inherent in nationalism, classism, and racism, it might become an agent of peace in the world. It was not immediately clear, however, how this was to be accomplished. While early members of the ecumenical movement clearly deplored violence and regretted the destruction brought about by the two world wars, they could not condemn war completely. For example, the preparatory material for the 1st Assembly stated that "Each war [has] brought about the disappearance of something imperfect...In that sense, the change was good." (5) The report of the 1st Assembly was itself ambiguous on the matter of war. On the one hand, it stated that "war as a method of settling disputes is incompatible with the

teaching and example of our Lord Jesus Christ." (6) On the other hand, after asking the question of whether war can be an act of justice, the Assembly stated that they could not answer the question unanimously, spelling out three different positions ranging from complete pacifism to the belief that military action is the ultimate sanction of the law and that citizens have a duty to defend the law. (7) The Assembly urged the churches to "continue to hold within their full fellowship all who sincerely profess such viewpoints". (8)

Even at this early stage the WCC (and its forerunners) were beginning to tie peace and justice together. The preparatory material for the 1st Assembly commented directly on its work, or lack of it, on peace:

Some will be suprised that little is said in this volume about the problem of peace, as such....Much more is said about human rights and liberties. Christians must repudiate the search for peace merely as an insurance for selfishness or as scope for overweening ambition. Subordination of the life of the nations and of individuals to God's will is indispensable to peace. Peace, as a supreme end in itself, has ceased to be the final objective of men's efforts." (9)

The authors spoke hopefully about the creation of an "international authority" which would unify the world and bring about real security. In the meantime, the ecumenical writers spoke of reconciliation and of "attacking the causes of war by promoting peaceful change and the pursuit of justice." The justice issues on which statements were made at the 1st Assembly included political economic systems, religious liberty, and aid to refugees. The scope of

concern for justice was still relatively confined to the Western world.

At the second Assembly in Evanston (1954) a strong statement was made for peace in terms of doing God's will, which was for peace. It was further noted that a right relationship to God was the only solid basis for living in peace:

The first responsibility of Christians is to live and work for the reconciliation of men to God, and therefore, as individuals and nations, to one another. Endeavors to secure that nations shall live together in peace on any basis less fundamental than this are always precarious; at any moment they may prove to be but frail expedients in a world which has not yet become subject to the power of the Cross. (10)

This is, again, an indication that the perspective of the council at this time was still somewhat limited to the Western viewpoint; after more churches from the third world and communist nations joined the council there seemed to be fewer sweeping statements about converting the world to Christianity, probably because of a tendency to be pragmatic and realistic, as Hoekema has pointed out. In spite of this, there is indication that the concern for justice was becoming more "globalized". A fairly clear definition of justice came out of the 2nd Assembly which stated that justice involved a "continuous effort to overcome those economic disadvantages which are a grievous human burden and which are incompatible with equal opportunity, and...it requires the formation of humane, participatory institutions which provide legal protection against the arbitrary use of power." (11) This definition was part of a

continuing effort to identify the marks of a responsible society. The international order which was hoped for embodied peace, justice, freedom, and truth.

Peace and justice are clearly connected here, setting the tone for a great deal of later work on the peaceful just society:

Christians everywhere are committed to world peace as a goal. However, for them "peace" means far more than mere "absence of war"; it is characterized positively by freedom, justice, truth, and love. For such peace the Church must labor and pray. (12)

The report called not only for the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction and reduction of other armaments but also for "the development and acceptance of methods for peaceful change to rectify existing injustices." (13) There is here the beginning of an understanding that injustice may be the cause of war and if we are to end war we must find a method of change other than violent revolution.

In the period between the 2nd and 3rd Assemblies two concerns with regard to peace stand out. One is a re-emphasis of the need for an alternative to war. The 1961 CCIA report stated that "unless effective alternative methods for adjusting international situations and claims are available, the dependence of governments upon national force, however perilous its exercise, tends to cut the nerve of resolution towards any far-reaching disarmament scheme." (14) We must find new ways to live together or face annihilation. The second was a growing concern about how to deal with the nuclear problem. A 1958 study asked,



"Since mankind--a humanity with permanent possibilities of conflict--has this power, how shall we live with it?" (15) Justice questions were related to the nuclear issue by the authors pointing out that if our primary concern is to prevent the use of nuclear arms, we must also attend to the causes of conflict and alleviate them:

Gross inequality in distributive justice is a fundamental cause of human conflict. Nations must be prepared to carry technical and economic aid to the point of sacrifice, to abate their claims on world resources so that the peoples of the globe may share fully in the wealth made possible by technology. (16)

The report of the study stated further that a peace based on unrighteousness was not a real peace.

Joe Keys has said in his study of the development of the concept of the just, participatory, and sustainable society that while there was not always a clear consensus in the WCC about the definition of justice, there has been continuing emphasis on the structural nature of justice and the need to create more just structures and systems. (17) By 1961 at the 3rd Assembly in New Delhi there was also a clear articulation of a need for more peaceful structures and systems. The report stated that "peace is dependent not only on good will and reconciliation but in the first place upon the emerging of effective international institutions under the law." (18) The stability of the international order and respect for international law were important concerns but there must also be "recognition of legitimate demands for its alteration" (19) so that the needs of the international community may be better met. There was

confusion over what kinds of institutions might be created to achieve peace through disarmament; some wanted strong international control of arms which would necessitate some kind of world police force while others felt it more realistic and desirable to work for disarmament at the local level so that there would be at least a lower level of weaponry in the world (rather than trying to eliminate them completely). Persons within existing institutions were urged to run risks for peace, to resist suspicion and to build up mutual confidence. There was a sense in which the "vicious circle of suspicion" in the world was unjust as well as dangerous since it contradicted the New Delhi definition of justice, i.e. "the expression of love in the structures of society." (20)

In the years between the 3rd and 4th Assemblies the World Conference on Church and Society met (1966). It was an important conference in the life of the WCC, issuing many statements on social issues that influenced the direction of Council work for years to come. Among the subjects addressed were peace and justice. The report of the conference stated that it was the function of the state "to provide, if necessary by lawful coercion, that order which enables men to live in peace and justice with one another." (21) In this nuclear age, governments must make it a first priority to prevent nuclear war. The report contended that certain changes would have to be made in order to achieve this:

If war is to be prevented, it is the situation which could lead to war that must be changed. We must take the long way of changing a balance of power into a community with institutions which are responsible for the common interest and through their remedial action help to prevent the escalation of conflict between the main powers. (22)

The balance of power in the contemporary situation was seen as dangerous and unjust. The nations with the really big guns had a tendency to protect their own economic interests, preventing economic improvement and political independence in other parts of the world.

While most of the developing nations have achieved formal political independence, many find that they are still economically dependent on the developed nations. And such dependence has tended to inhibit both economic and political development. (23)

It is practically impossible for many nations to become truly sovereign over such matters as trade and development in the face of concentrations of power in a very small number of groups. (24)

The document asserted that it was now technically possible to end hunger and poverty all over the world, but that this was "neither guaranteed nor assured" (25) in light of the unjust power distribution in the world. Because peaceful change was not assured, violent revolution could not be ruled out a priori.

The report from the 4th Assembly at Uppsala (1968) reiterated many of the same concerns for peace and justice. The Assembly affirmed the unity of creation and of all men, and called Christians to change:

This pressing forward [toward hope in Christ] implies that we turn away from that which separates us from Christ, and slough off that which hinders our obedience to him. It changes also our political thinking and acting. We are directed away from anxiety, resignation, self-assertion and oppression by guilt towards

openness and solidarity with all men, towards the venture of trust and the readiness to sacrifice for constructive solutions. (26)

The report spelled out several areas that specifically needed change and sacrifice, including working for the dignity and freedom of all and opposing racism; finding ways to reduce armaments and protect nations without nuclear arms; and finding peaceful ways to bring about economic change. There was a clear articulation of the relationship between economic injustice and disorder in the world and a call for change; however, as one commentator on the report "Towards Peace and Justice in International Affairs" pointed out, solutions were hard to find:

Poverty is both the cause of disorder and its consequence. Its roots are often political. Certainly its cure is not solely an economic problem. Justice and peace, if they are to be achieved, depend in part on the defeat of economic injustice. On that...Christians are agreed. They are not agreed on the remedies. Political differences at this point make prescriptions difficult. Even analysis is not a mere matter of scientific observation. Value judgements and ideological assumptions cloud many of the issues. (27)

This comment attests to the difficulty the WCC has had in making very specific statements about policy or actual suggestions for action in the area of justice, especially since by this time in the Council's history it had representatives from many different walks of life all over the world. This increasingly global representation was welcomed by the Council but at the same time it was recognized that it made addressing any problem much more complicated. The CCIA reports in Uppsala to Nairobi spoke about this change and how it had caused a shift in emphases in

their own programs, saying that they realized that all their analyses were based on limited presuppositions and that their experiences "have forced us to challenge the idea that we can conceive of specifically Christian universals, and to suspect that absolute objectivity and neutrality in political, economic, and social matters is probably impossible." (28) They concluded that "the specificity or uniqueness of any Christian contribution can only be found in the basic conviction that there is a 'hope beyond hope'." (29) This Christian source of hope is thereafter asserted in almost every WCC document dealing with peace and justice.

There were several conferences that dealt specifically with peace issues following the Uppsala Assembly that explored the meaning of peace in a conflict-ridden world. In keeping with general expansion of perspective, the question of peace was put in the framework of the third world where there is constant systemic violence directed against the poor. One speaker at the consultation on "Alternatives to Conflict in the Quest for Peace" said that peace was a tough issue even to broach in poor countries:

It is difficult to talk about peace to the millions of people who live their life under inhuman conditions of grinding poverty, disease, illiteracy, and ultimately death. In such a dehumanizing situation, peace means a sinister conspiracy of the rich and the privileged against the poor and the underprivileged. (30)

The speaker was not saying that peace was an unimportant concern but that it needed to be understood "not as a static condition but a dynamic reality intimately related

to man's constant search for human dignity."(31) This dynamic reality or concept would include conflict because it involves the struggle for justice. The report went on to explore ways of dealing with conflict through law, non-violent resistance, and negotiation with an ultimate goal of reconciliation and genuine solidarity.

A report from a SODEPAX consultation (not closely related to the WCC but part of the ecumenical movement) echoed this important insight that peace is dynamic:

The search for peace cannot be expressed in any all-encompassing formula. In different political, social, and cultural situations the struggle for peace expresses itself in different ways, encounters different hindrances, makes different demands, raises different questions....therefore, it is necessary to analyze the problems of peace in concrete contexts.  
(32)

The report suggested three representative situations in which the search for peace might be different: a) countries in which the major threat is that of nuclear war [such as the U.S. or Europe]; b) countries in which development is the crucial task for the realization of peace [Asia]; and c) countries in which peace can be achieved only through liberation from unjust, repressive political and economic structures [Latin America].

The fifth Assembly (Nairobi, 1975) was noteworthy (for the purpose of this paper) for its expanded definition of justice and for the way it described the problem of militarism in the world. With regard to the first of these, the WCC in 1975 adopted a new model for the responsible society: the just, participatory, and

sustainable society. Justice and participation had been present before to a large degree but sustainability was a relatively new concern. In an important speech that described the meaning of this term, Charles Birch said that there are two requirements of a global society:

A prior requirement... is that it must be so organized that the life of man and other living creatures on which his life depends can be sustained indefinitely within the limits of the earth. A second requirement is that it be sustained at a quality of life that makes possible fulfilment of human life for all people. (33)

The fact that the earth's resources might run out was understood to be a new threat to human survival which must be addressed along with other problems. Although this was not related to peace specifically, there was a clear emphasis on the interrelatedness of all the threats to survival that humans face:

The proliferation of more lethal weapons of war; increasing world population; hunger, undernourishment, and famine; pollution of the human environment; the limits of natural resources; the gap between rich and poor, and between developed and underdeveloped countries; the energy crisis of the last two years---all these and more are threats to the survival of humanity, and they are interrelated. These are all global in their dimensions and demand global perspectives in dealing with them. We are all called to think, decide, and act globally and not out of national or sectional self-interest. (34)

The report showed that the problem of militarization was a threat not only in terms of the destructive potential of weapons and armies but also was linked to justice in terms of being an economic problem. The report stated, "One of the biggest shames and tragedies of our times in the matter of utilization of resources is the big share claimed by armament production in all parts of the

world." (35) This expenditure was labled "a gross distortion of priorities". Besides the waste, militarization was problematic because it further entrenched imbalances of power in the world; arms become "tools of control and domination...of the peoples of the dependent countries." (36)

After the 5th Assembly there was increasing attention paid to the problems of militarization and the arms race. Militarization was defined as "the process whereby military values, ideology and patterns of behavior achieve a dominating influence on the political, social, economic, and external affairs of the state and as a consequence the structural, ideological, and behavioral patterns of both the society and the government are 'militarized'." (37) It is apparent in this definition that the WCC concern for peace had become structurally oriented just as the concern for justice had. Later in the same report, the CCIA gave the un-peaceful structure a name, and said specifically how it prevents justice from becoming a reality:

The interlocking relationship between the existing economic order and the military-industrial-bureaucratic-technological complex hinders the proper utilization of available resources and distorts development priorities. Disarmament is therefore essential for the proper utilization of the human and material resources available for social development and for the creation of a new international social order. The arms race has further detrimental effects on national and international development in that it has caused military reseach and development to predominate in science and technology. (38)

Because the economic order and military-industrial-bureaucratic-technological order are so closely linked,



there is a new danger that "special or even broad sectors of the society will resist disarmament measures for mainly economic reasons." (39) The ecumenical movement has thus put its finger on a "catch 22": there can be no justice until there is disarmament, and there can be no disarmament without justice, that is, until there are some changes made in the economic structures that support the arms race.

This kind of insight has shaped the direction the Council has moved in since 1975. Konrad Raiser sums up the Council's work since Nairobi by saying that the program emphasis on the JPSS "acknowledges the need to move from a cure of symptoms, searching for solutions to specific problems, to a clearer identification of root causes." (40) The Programme on Militarism and the Arms Race, formed in the CCIA after Nairobi, is "an essential component part of this overall programme emphasis." (41) The Nairobi Assembly called for a conference on disarmament that would clarify some of the specialized issues having to do with disarmament, and one was held in 1978 in Glion, Switzerland. The conferees reviewed such issues as the legitimate quest for security, peace as a human right, and the links between disarmament and development.

In 1980 the Central Committee called for another conference on disarmament which would focus especially on the danger of nuclear war and nuclear armaments. Its aims were to assess the problems connected with the arms race and defence strategies, to examine the "stalemate" in ef-

forts for disarmament, and to look at Christian approaches to these problems. This was seen as an addition to the positions and actions already taken by the churches which had expressed "their commitment to world peace based on justice". (42) The Public Hearing on Nuclear Weapons and Disarmament, which took place in 1981, did not as a whole focus on the interconnectedness of peace and justice as much as some past conferences and documents had, but it did make some important contributions to this understanding. For example, in the discussion on the meaning of security it was stated that "world security is indivisible. There can be no security for any unless there is security for all." (43) Once again the WCC pointed out that peace cannot be attained in isolation from other issues or by an isolated country without dealing with other nations. The connectedness of issues was one reason that the whole issue of disarmament is so difficult to approach:

The inextricable mixture of military, political and economic factors, and the extreme difficulty of trying to adjust the balance of power in any or all of these areas, encourage many to accept the status quo in sheer bewilderment. But the apparent stability is an illusion. (44)

The report noted further that stopping the arms race would only solve part of the problem. Such a stoppage would have to be followed by "general disarmament and effective political measures for ensuring security for all." (45)

The recommendations made for action by Christians included taking a clear moral stand against "the production and deployment as well as the use of nuclear weapons" (46);

creating confidence and understanding between nations; overcoming cynicism, despair and indifference; and connecting with other peace movements. The conference also issued a call:

The churches have a particular responsibility to remind public opinion of the close links between disarmament and development policies, and to associate the efforts for disarmament with the wider issues of justice, nationally and globally. (47)

The delegates to the 6th Assembly of the WCC held at Vancouver in the summer of 1983 stated unequivocally that "The ecumenical approach to peace and justice is based on the belief that without justice for all everywhere we shall never have peace anywhere." (48) The concerns for peace and justice and the interrelatedness of these issues, as we have seen, have long been part of the WCC's work; but at the Vancouver Assembly they came to the foreground and were articulated with especial urgency. Therefore, to conclude this chapter, I will report in a little more detail the work of the 6th Assembly in order to show where this historic concern has led the ecumenical movement. I shall discuss the issues of peace and justice separately and then look at the way the Assembly spoke of the ties between them.

With the 6th Assembly the importance of peace for the world has been particularly emphasized by the Council. Survival itself has now been called into question; the title of one of the 6th Assembly's sub groups was "Confronting Threats to Peace and Survival". The prepara

tory material for the Assembly clearly conveyed this sense of gravity: "The opposition to militarism and the arms race and the struggle to prevent a nuclear war are now seen as a necessity for human survival, not only a moral duty." (49) Peace was said to be one of the essential conditions, though not the only one, for the survival of a world shaped by science and technology. (50) In keeping with the importance of this concern, the official report of the 6th Assembly included not only a report from the aforementioned sub-group, but also a separate statement on peace and justice.

The report from the issue group on threats to peace and survival dealt with security, militarism in relation to economic justice, and nuclear arms, doctrines, and disarmament. With regard to the first, the report stated that human beings had a right to live in security, which implied "economic and social justice for all, protection and defence of life within a political framework designed to ensure this." (51) Security was recognized as a legitimate concern, but within limits.

Current concepts of national security are to be challenged where they conflict with the demands of justice, exceed the needs to legitimate defence, or seek economic, political and military domination of others. (52)

Security was seen as a global concern; the report stated that "no nation can achieve security at the expense of others." (53) With regard to the problem of militarism, the Assembly stated that "justice is often sacrificed on the altar of narrowly perceived national security interests."

(54) The cause of justice is set back not only within national borders but internationally.

Whereas people's aspirations for and expectations of a more just order have been supported as legitimate, the big powers still use military might to buttress the unjust order in order to protect their own interests.  
(55)

The core of the Assembly's statement on nuclear arms, doctrines, and disarmament was a statement taken from the 1981 Public Hearing on Nuclear Weapons and Disarmament:

We believe that the time has come when the churches must unequivocally declare that the production and deployment as well as the use of nuclear weapons are a crime against humanity and that such activities must be condemned on ethical and theological grounds. (56)

The report went on to reject the policy of deterrence as a ground for peace and to affirm various arms control measures.

The Assembly had several proposals for working for peace. The churches should:

- support educational programs on peace
- support efforts to define positive alternatives to militarism and military defence;
- establish links with other peace movements;
- reflect theologically on civil disobedience and non-violent protest;
- support those who take a conscientious stand on refusal to participate in war or preparations for war;
- support efforts to build a New World Economic Order as a basis for global security. (57)

The churches were also urged to work for unity and common witness and to "become a living witness to peace and justice through prayer, worship, and concrete involvement."

(58)

Although in this paper less has been said about justice than peace, the concern for justice has been as

important if not more important than the concern for peace. Statements relating to justice just before and during the 6th Assembly were both simple and complex. Simply put, justice "implies that those who suffer from unjust structures need to be restored." (59) It is, as we have seen, in naming those unjust structures that the complexities become apparent:

As never before, economic interests, military might, technological knowledge and international alliances form a constellation of forces arrayed against the dignity of life in the world--Jesus Christ himself! The consequences are formidable; immense human suffering, degradation, and death. (60)

As with the peace issue, new urgency was conveyed in many of the Council's statements. The preparatory material for the Assembly reminded participants that the struggle for justice was not new, that it had in fact been "a continuing reality of human existence." "But," it said, "it is particularly crucial now because structural injustice is more entrenched and the violation of human dignity is more systematic in our time than ever before." (61) The churches are not unaware of this:

Churches have been made aware through their involvement that they cannot sit on the sidelines while violations of human life go on unchecked. The forces of death, destruction, and devastation are material as well as spiritual...The struggle against these forces has to be waged with the material and spiritual resources available to the churches. (62)

Perhaps one of the outstanding features of recent material on justice is the way ecumenical thinkers have brought the struggle for justice under the umbrella of the distribution of power. The Central Committee, for example,

has spoken of the convergence of many issues at the point of power:

The preliminary study on the questions of political ethics has further demonstrated that the issue of Christian responsibility and ecumenical solidarity in facing the structures of political power has become one of the areas requiring urgent attention. The programmes on Militarism, on Human Rights, on Development, and a New International Economic Order, and on Racism, all converge on this area of enquiry. (63)

The preparatory material for the 6th Assembly spoke of a worldwide power struggle as the key to understanding unjust structures:

The whole world is caught in a deep tension between those who yearn for justice and human dignity and those who seek to maintain the present power relationships, whether their ideology is capitalist or socialist---between people wanting to share power to shape the future and people holding on to power which shaped the past. (64)

The 6th Assembly, then, spoke of power as that which is given by God but which can be and is being abused. The call for justice was put in terms of a more just use and distribution of power:

In order to struggle for justice and human dignity we must resist oppressive powers. We are called to be in solidarity with those who build up people's power designed to shape a more participatory society through the legitimate exercise of power. (65)

The Assembly report also spoke of the "interlinkages among various manifestations of injustice and oppression", (66) giving attention to such issues as racism, sexism, class domination, and human rights and the way these are related.

A large section of the report of the issue group on "Struggling for Justice and Human Dignity" was devoted to

recommendations to the churches. The first suggestion was that churches should enter into a covenant together to:

- confess Christ, the life of the world, as the Lord over the idols of our times, the Good Shepherd who "brings life and life in its fullness" for his people and for all creation;
- resist the demonic powers of death inherent in racism, sexism, class domination, caste oppression, and militarism;
- repudiate the misuse of economic organization, science and technology, in the service of powers and principalities and against people. (67)

Secondly, the churches should seek to strengthen their spiritual lives, making justice and human dignity a central focus. Thirdly, the churches should seek ways that they can be in solidarity with the poor and oppressed and the victims of violence. They should protect victims of violence in any way possible, and should work also to combat unjust economic structures. Fourthly, the churches should continue to strengthen networks of communication and dialogue among different peoples of the world. Lastly, the churches should work to give more financial support to those working for justice and human dignity.

In the preceding pages I have treated peace and justice as separate issues. However, the important feature of the 6th Assembly's treatment of these issues is the way they were tied together. Peace and justice had been tied together before in ecumenical thinking; but at this Assembly the connectedness of these concerns was an issue in itself. The result was that, in spite of the fact that I have just attempted it myself, the two concerns are very difficult to separate in the Assembly's preparatory



material and reports. (I believe there is clear evidence of this fact in some of the work quoted under the previous two sections.) Perhaps one of the simplest statements of this connectedness, quoted already in chapter one, was included in the 6th Assembly's preparation papers:

Peace is more than the absence of war. The "cold" peace which is based on arms, on a balance of terror and on injustice, hunger, and poverty, needs to be replaced by the "warm" peace which is the absence of fear and incorporates justice, well-being, equality and sharing. (68)

This kind of declaration is intended to correct those who tend to think of peace simply in terms of the arms race and detente between the superpowers. As we saw in chapter one, there has been a struggle in the ecumenical movement between those who think of peacemaking primarily in terms of nuclear disarmament and those who want peacemaking to be broadened to include justice issues. This long struggle, which became especially apparent at the 6th Assembly, has culminated in the Vancouver Assembly's Statement on Peace and Justice, which held the two approaches in balance. The Statement spoke of the dangers of the escalating nuclear arms race and its effect on the world; but then reminds the reader that "for many millions...the most immediate threat to survival is not posed by nuclear weapons." (69) Rather, the majority of people in the world were faced with conventional warfare, institutionalized violence, and what are referred to as economic threats to peace, hunger and poverty. The conclusion reached was that there can be no peace without justice:

The peoples of the world stand in need of peace and justice. Peace is not just the absence of war. Peace cannot be built on foundations of injustice. Peace requires a new international order based on justice for and within all the nations, and respect for the God-given humanity and dignity of every person. Peace is, as the Prophet Isaiah has taught us, the effect of righteousness. (70)

In conclusion, the conception of the interlinkage of peace and justice came about as a result of changes in the perspective of the WCC as its representation became more global and changes in the world situation itself, that is, changes in the structures that define our social existence. We have seen how the WCC has gone from having a Western, almost paternalistic perspective, making broad universalistic statements about new international societies, to a more global perspective which recognized the necessity of solutions in particular contexts which differ from each other while at the same time recognizing the effects each problem has on the entire globe. The Council has lived through the age in which the world has shrunk: nationalism has become outmoded as we have created problems on a global scale, problems such as the threats of overpopulation, nuclear disaster, reaching the limits of the planet's capacity to sustain life. The principalities and powers cast their nets of injustice over the whole world and there are no piecemeal solutions. The WCC, engaged in its pastoral role of responding to the needs of those whom it serves, has given voice to those who are "demanding justice, crying for peace." (71) As the

people's needs have changed, the WCC's analysis of the world and suggested approaches to solutions have changed also.

Some things have remained constant, and these may be the heart of the worldwide church's contribution to our continuing survival. The ecumenical literature always insists on the dignity of every person regardless of race, gender, ideology, class, or nation. As it has come to hear the voices of more of the peoples of the world, it further clarifies the meaning of the quality of life for all. Second, it pins its hopes not on success or popularity but on faith in God, which gives us "hope beyond hope" no matter how grim the world situation looks. Third, it asserts the possibility of real change in the world even as it acknowledges the difficulty or complexity of change. As the 6th Assembly report says, "Christians cannot view the dangers of this moment as inherent in the nature of things." (72) The WCC continues to envision new beginnings, better futures:

As believers in the one Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, we are stewards of God's hope for the future of creation. We know God's love and confess a Lord of history in whom we have the promise of the fullness of life. God's mercy is everlasting, and the Holy Spirit is moving among us, kindling the love which drives out fear, renewing our vision of peace, stirring our imaginations, leading us through the wilderness, freeing us and uniting us. (73)

I think it would be safe to say that the peace movement in the United States today is in the same boat that the precursors of the WCC and the early WCC were in, i.e., having a limited perspective about the pursuit of

peace. The nuclear issue on which we usually focus, is extremely important; one could hardly overestimate the urgency of controlling nuclear proliferation and preventing a nuclear war. However, as we have seen, it is not the whole picture; indeed, attempting to solve just the nuclear problem may be impossible because the causes of the nuclear arms race are so intimately related to larger economic and political injustices. Taking account of global justice issues may seem on the surface to make the solution to the nuclear problem infinitely more complicated, but if it moves us from the realm of the impossible into the possible, surely the larger perspective is worthwhile and necessary.

Trying to see things from a global perspective is frightening. The really big problems, or the "root causes" are very difficult to understand and their very complexity makes any move toward solution seem hopeless and insignificant to some degree. The temptation to either despair or complacency is great. The danger that we may "accept the status quo in sheer bewilderment" is great. We must find ways around these negative possibilities.

I believe the way to avoid despair and complacency is to re examine the things we believe about the nature of things, the way the world is structured and, most importantly, the way God works in the world. Do we have a theological structure that leads us courageously into action, that keeps our hope alive? What does our faith say

about justice and peace and our part in bringing it about? How do our beliefs about God and the world influence the way we act? As I have said before, process theology is becoming for me the faith system that gives me hope and courage and perspective on the world's problems. In the next chapter I will address some of the theological issues and questions raised by the ecumenical work on justice and peace, looking at some process interpretations of these issues.

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## CHAPTER III

### SELECTED THEOLOGICAL ISSUES

I have selected for discussion five general topics that seem to be important in the discussions of peace and justice in the ecumenical literature. The first is the nature of God, God's power and the way God operates. The second is the nature of human power and humanity's freedom to act, and human responsibility. The third is the Kingdom of God, including conceptions of hope and eschatology. The fourth is the relationship of nature to humanity and God, as it relates to the issue of sustainability. The fifth is the issue of dialogue. In each area I will cite some representative ideas from the ecumenical literature and then offer some ideas from process thought as a possibility for new direction in theological thought. It should be noted that I have not made a careful study of the WCC's strictly theological thought, which would be found in the Faith and Order half of the organization. I am only reporting on the theological statements in the material on peace and justice that I have studied. For this reason my understanding of what the WCC "really believes" (if there is such a thing) may be somewhat limited. Some of the material I will examine was not mentioned in the second chapter; however, it all comes out of the context of the WCC work on justice and peace.

## THE NATURE OF GOD

From the earliest stages, the ecumenical literature characterizes God as being supremely powerful and essentially in control. The report of the first Assembly states that "The world is in God's hands. His purpose may be thwarted and delayed, but it cannot be finally frustrated." (1) This view does not change appreciably through the years of the WCC's history. God will eventually bring about salvation, justice and peace. This salvation, most often spoken of in terms of God's kingdom, is "God's work in his own time." (2) How this will happen is unclear; but that it will happen is certain. God is frequently spoken of as the Creator and as the one who sent Jesus Christ. God is "the giver, redeemer and sanctifier of life," and "the source of all powers, even those that can be used against God's own being." (3)

God's power is an especially rich area for discussion in the ecumenical literature. God's power to control history so that the future ends in God's salvation is heavily depended upon as a source of hope and a reason to do God's will now. Christians are "followers of one who rules the whole world." (4) But a paradox is acknowledged in the way God uses God's power. While the following quotation is from SODEPAX and not the WCC, I think it is representative of much of the thinking of the Council as well:

All power is of God, and God by creating man in his image has empowered man to have dominion over nature,

to bring forth its fruits, to express his humanity in arts and culture, and to appreciate the divine acts and glory in the things that are made, thus praising God and responding to him. But God's power is expressed in his love. It is supremely and most effectively present in the servant-lord Jesus Christ who was executed by human powers, and who in his risen power subjects them to humanizing functions of justice and peace despite themselves. (5)

Jesus Christ on the one hand represents God's ultimate power over death, which is very powerful indeed; "the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ opens up for the whole of creation the possibility of new life out of death." (6) But on the other hand Jesus represents a giving over of power, at least as far as the real world is concerned. Jesus' power is "manifested through weakness", making us "apparently powerless." (7) This powerlessness represents relinquishing worldly power and opening ourselves to God's power in our lives. This is possible through Jesus' incarnation:

In becoming human, God comes down to the lowly and makes use of his power for healing and salvation. Since He becomes incarnate not only in the spirit but also in the body of a historical human being, He allows the material world also to share in his saving work. (8)

The worldly powers have been defeated by God in Christ, and we share in the victory by submitting ourselves to God's power.

There is a sense that God's power and the world's power are different, but the difference is not spelled out. There seem to be differing opinions about what the activity of God outside God's work through humanity might consist of, but there seems little doubt that God can act (and exist) independently of the world. God is definitely tran-

scendent, though not uninterested in what happens on earth.

I think process theology offers a solution to the confusion about what power means and what kind of power God exercises. Two kinds of power are defined: coercive power, which is the exercise of power without the co-operation of the thing being coerced; and persuasive power, which consists in "the presentation of an ideal as a possibility for the sentient being's self-formation...this possibility produces its effect...purely in terms of its inherent attractiveness." (9) Some persuasion is more coercive than other kinds of persuasion in the sense that one can be powerfully persuaded by a threat against one's body or livelihood. Process theologians such as David Griffin hold that the belief that God possesses ultimate coercive power, the power to intervene in history when God chooses and even to end history has been destructive in terms of the way faithful persons are led to act. If we believe that the real power that makes God God is coercive, then as we try to do God's will or imitate God, we will talk about love but ultimately be tempted to resort to brute force or very coercive persuasion in our action.

It is more constructive and more in keeping with our understanding of the nature of the world to conceive of God as having persuasive power, that is, the persuasive power of love. This is not a coercive, destructive power but a power which offers possibilities for creative self-transcendence to beings in the world who are then free to

respond in any way. This may appear to be weakness against the more coercive power people try to exercise over each other in the world, but it is based on the belief that love is in fact the most powerful force in the universe and will eventually win out over hate and destructiveness. Many process theologians propose that God does not hold in reserve any other kind of power; persuasion is the only way God ever acts in the world and the only way God can act. At this point I am disinclined to rule out completely the possibility that God could have coercive power but agree that from what we can observe God chooses to act persuasively.

All beings have experience and can respond to influence from the environment as well as acting out of their own identities. God is one of the factors to which beings respond:

Every event in the world is an experience responding not only to the finite events in its past but to that all-persuasive experience which is God. God influences a finite being by envisaging a novel possibility for it appetitively. When an enduring individual begins feeling this divine appetite conformally, a corresponding appetite is evoked in it for this possibility....When this novel form is no longer felt only mentally but also physically, ...it becomes a full-fledged ingredient of the created order...God's role in this new creation is that of envisaging this possible way of being human with appetite, as an attractive ideal...Whether this new ideal actually becomes incarnate in the world...is then up to us. (10)

God is, then, constantly involved in history, patiently persuading the new creation into being. In less technical language than Griffin's, Norman Pittenger says that God is "in the world, with cherishing care 'tending it' and

bringing it on towards final good, while at the same time he redeems it from triviality and frustration." (11) This redemption is defined by Schubert Ogden as

the unique process of God's self-actualization, whereby he creatively synthesizes all other things in his own actual being as God...He thereby delivers [all people] from the meaninglessness of not making any difference to anything or anyone more enduring than themselves. (12)

Thus God prehends or feels everything in the world so that everything that happens becomes part of God's experience, part of God. If we do what is good, God is enriched; if we act unlovingly or destructively, God suffers but is still able to offer new possibilities for good out of the new situation. In this view God is transcendent in that God prehends everything but God is not unmoving and unchangeable. Rather God is self-surpassing, growing and changing as the world changes. There is no final perfection that God has already reached. The future is radically open, even for God. This means that God does not have ultimate power or control over evil. The capacity for evil must increase with the increasing capacity for the experience or enjoyment of value that God has willed in the world.

Jesus Christ is divine in the sense that his will for himself was the same as God's will for him, which is unique in human history. As such he reveals God's character, which is love for the whole creation; God's mode of agency, which is persuasion, and God's purpose, which is the enjoyment of greater and greater value. Jesus also

reveals the human condition and human possibilities by showing us that the power of evil is real but that the world can be transformed; by demonstrating integrated existence in relationship to God and the world; and by showing us that we are not enslaved to the world as it is but are free to change ourselves and to effect change in the world.

(13)

This view of God (and Jesus) is different from traditional theology but it does not require scrapping all the traditional categories for talking about God. For example, Marjorie Suchocki has written about the traditional trinity of Son, Spirit, and Father as Presence, Wisdom, and Power:

We advocate, then, that the triune nature of God for us be expressed directly through the understanding of God's presence with us and for us through Jesus of Nazareth; through the wisdom of God whereby God brings the church to birth in each generation,...and through the power of God, bringing the world to justice within the transformation of the divine being and guiding the finite world toward societal forms of justice. This is "God for us" in the world-ward orientation of the trinity. (14)

The major differences between this view of God and the more traditional view of God represented in the ecumenical literature are that God does not use coercive power but works through persuasive love; that God is affected by what happens in the world; and thus that the future is not known by God but is open for God as well as for the world.



## HUMAN POWER, FREEDOM, AND RESPONSIBILITY

One of the things the ecumenical movement does best is to call people to action. Christians must strive to be faithful to God in their lifestyles as well as in worship and theology. While there is a unity throughout the years in the insistence on responsible action, there is no single way in which this action is called for. David Griffin uses three categories of "ways to be in harmony with the Holy Power" which may be helpful in this discussion of the things the ecumenical literature suggests people should do. These are (1) obeying God's commands; (2) helping to bring about God's goal for the world; and (3) imitating God's own mode of agency, insofar as possible. (15)

An example of the first category can be found in the report of the Uppsala Assembly. In the report "Towards Justice and Peace in International Affairs" several "Christian insights" were listed that had their basis in "the Word of God". The pattern was to list the statement from the Word (these were general statements, not specific scriptural references) and then to conclude what Christians ought to do because of this word. For instance:

The Word of God testifies that the reconciling work of God makes an end to all division and enmity.

We Christians, who have often been irreconcilable, hear the call for the end of racial divisions and political tensions. This drives us to seek to keep open the lines of communication between races, age-groups, nations and blocs, in order to bring about reconciliation. (16)

In more general language, the WCC often speaks of God's "requirements", as in this statement:

Because we believe...that God made us and all creation...He requires us to seek peace, justice, and freedom, creating a world where none need fear and every life is sacred... (17)

In the second category, there are quite a few references to working with God toward the goal of the new creation or the kingdom. The first Assembly put it most explicitly: "We are labourers together with God, Who in Christ has given us the way of overcoming demonic forces in history." (18) The report of the consultation on Militarism (Glion 1977) said that Christians must go beyond denunciation of structures of evil to "participation in the realization of the New Creation." (19) There is consistent denial of the idea that humans can bring about the Kingdom of God, but this does not prevent people of faith from working as if this were their goal:

...the biblical message of God's lordship...reserves the coming of the kingdom completely to God's doing and does not allow it in any way to appear to result from behaviour which, instead of closing the present to the coming of God's lordship, witnesses to the fact that it is coming....From this follows... the fact that the expectation of the Kingdom of God incites us to orient our actions toward a more human future. (20)

Christians, then help to bring about God's goal for the world but do not do it by themselves.

In terms of the last category, there is more talk about witnessing to God than imitating God, but I think it is close to the same. The church witnesses to the reconciling power of God by becoming a reconciling community; it witnesses to God's justice by working toward just structures on earth; it witnesses to God's love by

trying to live in the world in love. There is also mention of responsiveness to God's love or to the cross and resurrection which results in loving action.

The above calls attention to Christians' responsibility to act and the sources of that responsibility. Less is said, in general, about people's freedom to act and their power to effect change. There is a great deal said about the Powers arrayed against those who are trying to do God's will in the world. These are the oppressive structures of injustice and violence which we saw evidence of in the first chapter. There is recognition, especially in recent years, that power is necessary in order to effect change, but there is a great deal of ambiguity about the value of power and many warnings against its misuse. It is important, however, that one of the forces of dehumanization identified in the world was a sense of powerlessness:

Scientific understanding of what it means to be human has also contributed to an erosion of the sense of responsibility. The individual appears to be reduced to the role of passive respondent to forces, from within and without, that are not under the control of will and reason. Powerful forces use the latest discoveries in psychology, in medicine, and in the mass media to manipulate entire populations. Thus the very meaning of what it means to be human is at stake. (21)

Being human apparently means that we have power to act. But there is no guarantee and very little hope that we will win out against the worldly Powers until God wins the final victory by ushering in the kingdom. Most of the meaningfulness of human action is tied to the hope in this final victory. Even if we despair in the present, the

promise of the future keeps us going.

It seems to me that in process thought the reason or motivation for human action comes out of the second category, helping to bring about God's goal for the world, and the third category, imitating God's own mode of agency. Bringing about God's goal, the Kingdom, will be discussed in the section on that concept to follow. For this section I will look at imitating God. It is understood in the process system that this means acting in harmony with God and with the created order, within which God works as well. One of the characteristics of the world that is important in this thought system is the interrelatedness of all things and the inability of any person or other creature to exist and act in isolation. This world view provides not only a frame of reference for action but gives meaning to action:

The problem of responsible action is tied to how we understand the world...The process view of the interrelatedness of all things, action, ideas, people, eco-system, provides a theological understanding which affirms that an individual is capable of acting without the debilitating notion that the individual is the only actor. The many become one. (22)

The world, including humankind, becomes a co-creator with God, acting in harmony with God's will. We create our lives in love and justice as we understand God might.

George Hermanson believes that what we believe about the world and/or God will directly impact our action. This will be especially true if what we are trying to do is imitate God. He says that "conviction sets" or beliefs

about the world that are inadequate can lead to alienation and inaction; and that reconstructed conviction sets can give warrants for action. There are several ideas in the traditional understanding of God and the world that I believe result in what Hermanson has called "inadequate conviction sets" that have a negative effect on our action. The first is this idea that God knows the future and that God will make an end to history as we know it and bring about a different kind of history, God's kingdom. This notion seems to discourage, not encourage, meaningful action. Ever since I was a child I have been taught in Sunday school that God has a plan for my life, that God knows what is in my future and what I need to do is to make the correct choices so that I will be following God's plan for me. This is not sensible because if the future is already known, there is no real choice to be made, no real freedom. Furthermore, if the kingdom is coming with certainty, what I do or do not do makes no difference in the world, except perhaps to please or displease God. Unless I feel truly threatened by the possibility of eternal punishment (hell) there is no reason to act unselfishly; and fear, even if it is effective in some cases, is not the best motivation for action.

As we have seen, in process thought the future is radically open, even for God. William Beardslee points out that the process view "provides an alternative to a goal predetermined by an absolute deity [that] has usually seemed to be the repetition of a limited set of possibili-

ties." (23) If the future is really open, the possibilities for our action are not limited to one way to take the right path, or to follow the plan God has chosen for us. Humans begin to participate in God's creativity, helping shape the future. This participation is seen as a free response to God's love. It is not independent of God but is a response to and with the divine purpose:

God's action is first, since He always loves men and surrounds them with His loving action--but it is genuinely loving action and hence not pressure of a coercive type. On the other hand, man too is active, but his activity is also in love; he responds freely to the love which is given him and in that response he knows that he truly being himself, for he was intended by his creation to be a responding lover and in no sense a marionette pulled by strings manipulated by God--certainly not the victim of the divine coercion.  
(24)

Faith is, according to Norman Pittenger, an invitation to become lovers. (25) It is not a command, but an invitation, and response is given freely, not coerced by the threat of eternal punishment. The imitation of God's mode of agency comes in at the point of being lovers, of acting lovingly as God does. It also means that one would follow God's example in using persuasive rather than coercive power as one attempts to change things. That is, one should use persuasive power as much as possible, and should choose that as a more attractive option than coercion or very coercive persuasion, as Griffin might call it. It is questionable in the world as it is whether a system could rely completely on loving persuasion. Sometimes people have to be forced to do what is good for them or for

others. This is, I think, a matter of simply being realistic.

The encompassing principle is becoming loyal to God's love:

We are continually presented with the gift and demand of utterly trusting God's love as the only ultimate ground of our own being and meaning of everything else, and of being utterly loyal to this same love as the only cause inclusive enough in its concern for the fulfillment of all things to claim all our love and service...[This means] not only trust in God's love but also loyalty to God and therefore also to all those to whom he himself is loyal--which means, of course, literally everyone. (27)

Meaning for human action is derived, then, in several ways. One is that since the future is not determined, our response is important. We are co-creators of the future with God and whether we act lovingly or unlovingly will have a decisive effect on the way that future takes shape. A second source of meaning is that our action is not isolated either from other beings or from God. God needs us; "God needs a world...in order that God may be what God chooses to be, which is love." (26) God is affected by all the things that we do, since, as we have seen, God prehends everything that is in the world and everything becomes part of God's consequent nature. Our action is also prehended in a more limited way by other creatures so that it affects their action. What we do really makes a difference.

#### THE KINGDOM OF GOD, ESCHATOLOGY, AND HOPE

The ecumenical literature I have read is never very clear in its definition of the kingdom of God but it is

clear that it is a very important concept. For the most part, the kingdom represents the final victory of God over the principalities and powers of this world and the age of salvation. It is clear, as I have said before, that only God can bring about the kingdom, but that Christians can make use of it as "the standard by which [the world] should now be judged, and as a goal toward which it should now strive to move." (28) There are several instances in the ecumenical literature where the kingdom and human action are compared and distinguished. The following is a fairly representative quotation about how God and humans work together toward this goal:

Christians are called to work in society so as to make it more supportive of the values of the Kingdom, more expressive of the purposes of God in Christ. Human fallibility and sin make this a perilous task for anyone, and no less for Christians; yet we dare not refuse the invitation of our lord to seek his Kingdom. Christians do not, therefore, bring in from outside history elements which are not present within it; they try to recognize in events--in the movements and ideas around them--the activity of God. Because we believe that God is working for the fulfilment of his purposes, we try to uncover, and to give physical shape to his activity. (29)

In more conservative language, Christians are called to become signs of the coming kingdom through its witness to Christ. The Eastern Orthodox theologians, in the preparatory material for the 6th Assembly, say that "if the gospel does not prescribe programmes of social and political reform, it nonetheless calls men and women into the world to become witnesses for justice, signs of love, agents of consolation...that by our love we might demonstrate the truth of Christ's own message." (30) Elsewhere



the call to do justice by reforming the structures of the world is more specific, as we have seen in the second chapter. The general character of loving action is what ties it to God's kingdom: "There is a clear link between the justice of the Kingdom of God and the actions through which Christians give witness of it: both aim at justice among human beings." (31)

Eschatology, in the sense of the Christian hope in the end of history is treated cautiously in most of the ecumenical literature. One report asks how this is to be used in this day and age:

We live in an apocalyptic period of human history, under the threat of fiery destruction by nuclear weapons. How are we to appropriate the eschatological hope given to us for our responsibilities in the here and now to avert global disaster? (32)

There are frequent warnings about "apocalyptic fatalism" which could lead either into "facile optimism" or despair rather than hopeful action. However, the Eastern Orthodox theologians take the eschatological vision more seriously as a source of hope:

The first heaven and the first earth are destined to pass away, even if we do not kill them by our irresponsible exploitation of nature or the biological manipulation of life or the neutron bombs we are manufacturing...The New Jerusalem is our sure hope. (33)

As with the other notions about the kingdom, the apocalypse is the work of God and humans should not take it upon themselves to end the world.

Hope, as we have seen, is most often spoken of with reference to the assurance of God's eventual victory over

the powers of the world. Working for the cause of God is never futile because ultimately God reigns over the universe, and the destinies of the nations are in God's hands. Unflagging hope for the world is an important part of the Christian life, and a unique characteristic that Christians bring to the world. One report of the Central Committee states that "We have found that the specificity or uniqueness of any Christian contribution can only be found in the basic conviction that there is a 'hope beyond hope'." (34) Christians are called to be "bearers of the light of hope amidst the prevailing gloom of despondency." (35) Hope is frequently equated with faith.

I think that the vision of God's kingdom would be more effective in its influence on our action if it were defined or described more clearly than in the bulk of the WCC material. Process theology offers a fresh and interesting conception of the kingdom that may be helpful in this regard. I am particularly impressed by Marjorie Suchocki's work in this area. She recognizes two dimensions in the biblical references to the Kingdom of God:

Clearly, the kingdom is God's triumph of goodness over evil in the ultimacy of justice. This triumph of the good is given two dimensions: the temporal and the eternal. Temporally, the kingdom of God is realized in our openness to modes of justice in our daily lives...Eternally,, the kingdom relates to a resurrection of the dead, brought about solely through the power of God. The resurrection leads to immortality...for the sake of judgement and transformation, as all things are made new. (36)

The eternal sphere she speaks of is particularly interesting. It refers more to life after death than the

kingdom that will be on earth beyond our history. I cannot hope to summarize her intricate description of the soul's journey into God, except to say that through this process each person is drawn into God's nature and becomes part of the nature of God, experiencing judgement as one becomes aware in this movement of how closely one's own purposes were aligned with God's. The soul going back to God is transformed as "the boundary of the ego into the self-as-opposed-to-the-other breaks down. With its breakdown, the self becomes wider and wider." (37) The self is not lost but becomes part of the whole. Each person adds to the diversity of the divine harmony. David Griffin describes the same process by saying that since "the divine reality is also social, and involved in the ongoing process receptively as well as creatively,...we will be immortal in God, remembered and cherished unfadingly, forever enriching the divine experience." (38) This immortality in God, then, is our hope beyond our worldly existence. This gives our existence ultimate meaning.

The temporal dimension of the kingdom means that we act with God, we try to make God's aims our own and create social systems that are consistent with the loving purposes of God. George Allan suggests that God entertains goals not just for individuals but also for institutions and nations. However, these goals can only be communicated through individuals who are open to God's aims for them:

The divine aim to call forth civilizations whose meanings and purposes are at one with God's purposes-for-them and whose histories accord with the divine

activity succeeds, therefore, only where individual human beings, citizens of those societies, act and believe in ways transparent to the ways of God. (39)

The individual or the community, then participate in bringing about God's aim of the kingdom. It is done through persons, not independently of them.

One way of describing God's aims for the world is increasing the possibility for all things to participate in their own self-creation, since freedom is such an important part of the structure through which God works. As Delwin Brown says,

The Kingdom of God may be viewed as the kingdom of freedom because Jesus means freedom in his word and in his being. In this view, freedom promised and freedom [coming to be] possessed may rightly be said to be the content of the kingdom. (40)

With this perspective, we are to work for liberation from unjust structures so that "the existing world [will] itself permit the optimal exercise of its own freedom of self-creation." (41) We help by optimizing freedom in a variety of ways:

Our human response makes a genuine difference to the fate of God's aims for the world. If we choose to advance freedom at any level and any place, the aims of God are advanced. If we hinder freedom we thwart the divine purpose. (42)

Although this kind of vision gives some definite guidelines for action in the world, there is still no one type of government or structure that would be the same as the kingdom of God:

In the Kingdom of God, each contributes to the welfare of the whole and each receives from the welfare of the whole. In numerous ways, societies can mirror such a reality, for no one political system can exhaust such a vision of reciprocity and mutuality. (43)

Thus in the process vision, represented here by various theologians, the kingdom has both an eternal and a temporal dimension that are sensible and consistent with beliefs about God and the world. Meaning is derived from the eternal aspect of existence in God and the efficacy of one's action on earth as one participates with God in bringing about justice in the world that would characterize the kingdom. Many possibilities are open to us in attaining this vision.

I believe that process thought also provides a much more realistic basis for hope than does the WCC vision. The idea that history as we know it will end at some time which only God knows, which seems basic to the WCC understanding of the coming Kingdom of God, seems to trivialize our life here. If the real work is left up to God, nothing is really at stake in our present struggles. Furthermore, a closed future suggests not freedom but determinism. The idea that the future is radically open seems to me much more conducive to hope. For this reason I really appreciate John Cobb's conception of Christ as "the power of transformation, redemption, unification, and order" (44) and the call of Christ as "the not-yet-realized transforming the givenness of the past from a burden into a potentiality for new creation." (45) This orients us toward the future that is alive with new possibilities, with the opportunity to transcend our current situation and make a real and lasting difference in the world. Furthermore,

as Cobb says, "to identify Christ with the new is to see the new as unrealized potentiality for transforming the world without destroying it." (46) This view does not require that everything we have known and worked for be erased. Of course, the fact that the future is open does not mean that humans could not end history as we experience it on earth. Such a theological perspective does not protect us from ourselves! But the openness of the future means that we may be able to prevent such an end. If this self-imposed end to history can be avoided, it is possible that the future could go on into eternity. For example, one process theologian has suggested that there will be no final end to things because creativity never comes to an end. (47) The possibility for transformation is the basis for genuine hope.

#### SUSTAINABILITY

The issue of sustainability came into focus for the WCC around the time of the 5th Assembly and was affirmed by that assembly as part of the new theme for future WCC work (the just, participatory, and sustainable society). I think the work the WCC did on this was very positive, and I am bringing up this issue because the concern for sustainability seems to have slipped into oblivion during the most recent assembly. I will summarize some of the earlier work of the Council, both on stewardship and sustainability, more for the purpose of re-affirming this concern than for the purpose of offering a critique, and

will take a look at where the 6th Assembly has led and why. As we will see, many process ideas are used in the reasoning behind the focus on sustainability so it is not necessary to add a lot to it.

Charles Birch has been a leader in the cause of a sustainable society. In a speech to the 5th Assembly he called for sustainability by listing the threats to our survival and saying we must remove this threat by finding a new, sustainable lifestyle.

A prior requirement of any global society is that it be so organised that the life of man and other living creatures on which his life depends can be sustained indefinitely within the limits of the earth. A second requirement is that it be sustained at a quality which makes possible fulfilment of human life for all people. (48)

This was not to be seen as a separate issue from justice, but as part of the concern for justice. Birch said in the same speech, "It is a cock-eyed view that regards ecological liberation as a distraction from the task of liberation from the poor. One cannot be done without the other." (49) He stressed the interconnectedness between nature and humanity, saying that humanity cannot live apart from nature anyway, so it is absolutely necessary to attend to the earth which supports us. He went further than that, however, in affirming the process idea of the intrinsic value of creatures in themselves, apart from their use-value to humanity. This is an important idea, but I don't think the WCC as a whole really bought it; there is much more emphasis on being stewards of God's creation and

caring for it for that reason than there is on loving creation for its own sake. For example, the CCIA said in one report to the Central committee that the crisis we face in the world (the threat of pollution, famine, over population, worldwide thermonuclear war) is a result of neglecting our responsibilities as stewards:

Human beings are stewards in the world which God created; a world therefore in which harmony and peace are possible only in obedience to his will in the relationship between individuals, groups, and nations, and between mankind and the world of nature. The stewards have been disobedient. (50)

Much of the work on defining sustainability was done at the world conference of Church and Society entitled "Faith, Science, and the Future" held in 1979. Here a great deal of discussion on what a sustainable society would look like and how to make the transition took place. For the purpose of this paper, I will skip over all that and proceed to the theological work that was done in re-defining the relationship between humanity, God, and nature. The report of the conference bemoans the western technological view of nature and the approval the church has given to this view:

Science and technology, by reducing non-human nature to the status of a mere object, have denied the intrinsic value that inheres in every creature that comes from the hand of God. Modern western Christian theology put up little resistance to this development. Indeed, it undergirded the opposition between nature and humanity by making the uniqueness of humanity the predominant theme of its doctrine of creation. (51)

The report emphasized the necessity for doing justice not only for those who now suffer but for future generations and the non-human creation. It rejected the concept of



dominion, which suggests that humans have the authority to rule nature:

Humanity is temporally the last link in God's creation and, therefore, a part of nature, not apart from it. Persons share with the whole of creation the ultimate purposes which God has for it. What authority they possess, they possess within creation and not over creation; furthermore that authority is a gift from God and one for which men and women will be called to account by God. (52)

This kind of understanding was carried to the 6th assembly in the preparatory material as a challenge to form an ecological vision of the world and as a question: "How are we to live in God's creation in such a way that the life of all is sustained, and so that we know ourselves as being part of an interdependent network with all living forms and with all processes of nature?" (53) As I said above, I think this challenge and this question were largely ignored or overlooked at the Vancouver Assembly.

"Sustainability" did not even appear in the subject index of the 6th Assembly report. "Stewardship" has a few references, but none of them show evidence of the careful work on stewardship and sustainability done in the previous years. The most telling reference to stewardship was put entirely in the framework of "sharing material resources".

There is a great need for a new theological understanding of sharing material resources based on justice and solidarity with the poor...Christian stewardship implies that the churches develop mutual trust and hold each other accountable for the resources God has put in their hands...We must seek models of sharing material resources. The donor-receiver type of relationship must give way to relationships which facilitate the sharing of decision-making and power. (54)

There is no reference to the creation having any worth or value apart from its use as a resource, and the relationship to those resources is clearly a power-over relationship. There is solidarity with the poor but not with the non-human creation.

I believe the reason for this is that the 6th Assembly was so focused on worship, justice, and peace that all other issues got pushed to the back burner. As we have seen, the work the 6th Assembly did on the connection between justice and peace was very valuable. One would not wish to disparage this work. However, it could be taken one step further, or one step backward perhaps, so that the concern for justice includes the non-human world.

One way the Council could bring in the concern for sustainability again might be to look at the limits of the natural world to sustain us as one of the threats to peace and survival. It is easy to imagine that the wealthy nations will protect with military power the limited resources to which they presently have access. Another way, more fundamental and inclusive, would be to further expand its pastoral concern to include the earth. We have seen in chapter two how the concept of peace with justice grew as the WCC membership grew to include those with different needs than the first world Christians that began the ecumenical movement. As our understanding of the interconnectedness of all things in the world grows, perhaps the worldwide church's pastoral concern will grow with the new understanding, as it has in the past.

John Cobb argues that we can have a unified view of the world that attributes real value to the subhuman parts of nature. In the process view, the world is made up of electromagnetic events which take account of their environment at varying levels. Therefore,

No sharp line divides the animate from the inanimate...Our concern for the animate must shade off into concern for the total process and the whole of reality. But it is the animate, and especially the higher forms of life, that are now threatened with extinction. It is toward these that we need to extend our sense of kinship and concern. We are fellow creatures of an age-long creative process, sharing a common history and perhaps a common destiny. (55)

Cobb suggests that the Christian concern for others for the sake of their own value could be extended to subhuman life as well as human. This involves no disparagement of man, for "he is the apex and summation of nature." (56) He says,

Every human action must be measured in terms both of its consequences for man and of its consequences for other living things. That man is of vastly greater worth than any other creature does not reduce the value of the others to nothing. (57)

Thus, in the words of Marjorie Suchocki, "Justice extends beyond the human community to unite with the sustaining community of nature." (58)

#### DIALOGUE

Because the work of the WCC has such obvious global implications, I think it is important to examine how the Council's ideas exist alongside other faiths and ideologies in the world. This is an issue of peace, since faith is

important to millions of people and throughout history people of faith have thought it necessary to defend their faith with military power. It is an issue of justice since it is so difficult to affirm the value and treat as an equal a person of a different religion.

I see two streams in the ecumenical material about dialogue that may give conflicting messages. On the one hand, the importance of mutual confidence and trust and dialogue are repeatedly affirmed. As early as 1966, the World Conference on Church and Society stated "Real dialogue is needed; the tendency to absolutize ideologies must be challenged; an example of true community transcending the nations must be manifested; every conceivable means must be used to create a climate of confidence." (59) It is not clear what is meant by "ideology" in this context but if it includes systems of faith, this is indeed an important and progressive statement. In a later document the same kind of statement was made about resisting the tendency to absolutize ideologies because ideological differences "are used as the excuse for the continuing heightening of conflicts" which perpetuate the arms race. (60)

Some later documents go a step further by suggesting we may have something to gain from dialogue besides nurturing trust and confidence:

Some of the views of the other religions may prove both closer to the Bible and more appropriate to the intellectual and social needs of our time. This means that learning from neighbors of other faiths can lead to a valuable enrichment of our understanding of the

Bible and a fruitful reformulation of our theology.  
(61)

Along the same lines, the book on guidelines for dialogue published by the Council says that conviction and openness need to be held in balance in dialogue situations. Christians are "free to be open to the faiths of others, to risk and be vulnerable." (62) They should approach dialogue "with humility, because they so often perceive in people of other faiths a spirituality, dedication, compassion and a wisdom which should forbid them making judgments about others as though from a position of superiority." (63) The 6th Assembly report affirms the same kind of openness, saying that from dialogue "we expect to discern more about how God is active in our world, and to appreciate for their own sake the insights and experiences people of other faiths have of ultimate reality." (64) I think this kind of attitude about dialogue and the value of other faith systems is very healthy and should be encouraged.

The other stream of thought that contradicts the position summarized above is not necessarily overt and is harder to put one's finger on in some respects. The ecumenical literature is full of universal, exclusive proclamations about Christianity which seem to me to do more to build walls than to build bridges with persons of other faiths. I acknowledge the value of conviction about what we believe, and the value of witnessing to that faith. However, no matter how much the WCC talks about humility

and openness, there is evidence of a superiority complex about Christianity that is hard to get around. For example, in one document, after listing several "achievements" of other faiths, the authors say that "all these may be found in our Christian tradition" and what other religions may do is to "remind us of our blind spots and of insights we may have lost in our journey." (65) In other words, we already have all the answers but we may temporarily have forgotten them.

More blatant rejection of other faiths is found in the Eastern Orthodox contribution to the Vancouver Assembly. One theologian stated, "Jesus Christ is the only true 'life of the world', whether the world knows it or not, accepts it or not. He recapitulates the world and human history of which he is the beginning, the center, and the end." (66) I don't think other delegates to the Assembly probably would have made such a strong statement. But the choice of the theme itself, "Jesus Christ, the Life of the World", is somewhat exclusive. The report on the Jewish-Christian Consultation expressed discomfort about it:

It is impossible for us to ignore the possibility that the strong emphasis on Jesus Christ as "the life of the world could make real dialogue with people of other living faiths more difficult. The way the theme is formulated could give rise to the problematic notion that what Christians regard as a meaningful and fulfilled life begins with Jesus Christ and with him alone. (67)

I have found that there is too much indication that the WCC does believe that Christianity is the only true religion, in spite of some of its more liberal statements to the

contrary.

Again, I do not mean that Christians should not have strong convictions about what they believe. Process theology makes it possible to affirm that our faith is true without rejecting other faith perspectives as false. Faith is true to the extent that its vision of reality corresponds to central aspects of reality. The Christian faith has focused on the character, ultimate purpose, and mode of agency of God, and we believe these insights derived from the Biblical record and the life of Christ to be true. But other faiths may well correspond to other aspects of reality that we have not grasped; other faiths may also be true. Process theology, in the words of David Griffin, "provides a basis for taking the revelation of the Biblical God seriously while being radically open to enrichment and even transformation by the truths and values in other traditions." (68)

This idea of transformation by other truths and values is also important. John Cobb has written a book on this subject entitled Beyond Dialogue. In it he says that we need both conviction and openness. We need to be willing to subject our strong convictions to the light of criticism, knowing that one is really convinced, one does not need to fear criticism. But these strong convictions should not be utterly rigid:

We do better to enter dialogue with multiple and flexible hypotheses. We need to make clear that our interest in dialogue does not depend on the correctness of any of these hypotheses, that we enter dialogue in hopes of developing new and better hypotheses. (69)

Cobb suggests that the ultimate aim of dialogue ought to go beyond the exchange of information to the goal of mutual transformation. People of different faiths can not only listen to one another and respect one another but also be improved, have their perspectives broadened by other faiths.

I appreciate Daniel Day Williams' suggestion that there is an element of our own faith which may lead us into this kind of openness. He says in a discussion of agape, that

Agape always has an aspect of protest. It may be overt or silent, but it will resist the tendency to absolutization in every group cause. The protest arises when we claim too much for our purity of intention and the adequacy of our goals. (70)

In the struggle for a just peace in this world, we must hold ourselves in judgement lest we corrupt God's cause with our pride.

#### CONCLUSION

In the second chapter I indicated that, faced with such complex and serious problems, we are tempted to be either despairing or complacent, either of which responses prevent us from effective action to bring about justice and peace. I think the antidote to despair and complacency is hope. In this chapter I have tried to show that our vision of God and the world will make an important difference to the way that we act, so it is essential that our theology be constructive and hopeful. John Cobb has written about



what conditions make hope possible:

For historical hope to be sustained, three things are needed. First, there must be some conviction that the future is open, that human action can shape it to a significant extent. Second, there must be concern for the future of persons other than oneself, for a purely private hope is not historical. Third, a sense is needed of the possibility of being in or with a wider process tending to produce the desired results, for pure rebellion against the nature of things is not hope. (71)

As we have seen, process theology meets these requirements. The future is open, both for God and for humankind. Our action or lack of it makes an important difference in the shape of the future. Being loyal to God and God's love means being loyal to all those things which God is loyal to, which includes the whole earth, human and sub human. We do have the sense, as we try to conform to God's mode of agency (love), and act out of the understanding that everything is interconnected, that we are acting in harmony with a wider process. All these ideas point to the idea that hope can be genuine even in the face of injustice and unrest because change is not only a real possibility but is the way of the world and the will of God. Re thinking our theology in this way can fill us with zest for the future, for as George Hermanson says, "Ideas are not mere constructs. They have power to transform structures." (72)

The ecumenical literature has shown us how we may understand the power structures that are arrayed against peace and justice, and how and why Christians might act to bring about peace and justice. Process theology has shown us what kind of a theological world-view and God-view is

possible that can provide us with genuine hope in our struggles and make our action more meaningful. The next problem is the communication of these kinds of ideas to the actors we as leaders will be working with: the members of our churches. In the next chapter we will examine preaching as a method of communication, with an emphasis on the special problems and possibilities inherent in preaching on social issues.

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## CHAPTER IV

### INTERPRETATION IN PREACHING

One of the definitions of "preach" in Webster's dictionary is to "advocate earnestly". This is helpful in conceptualizing what may be done with this plethora of ideas about peace and justice and process theology. One preaches the gospel first; but one may advocate a certain world view or understanding of theology as background to that preaching.

The idea that one might consciously choose a perspective out of which one will work in such a matter as preaching seems at first somewhat awkward, if not sinful. However, it is my belief that one cannot think apart from some perceptual framework, some set of ideas already in existence that will color any information one tries to absorb. It is better to be conscious of that perceptual framework and even to work it out logically than to run the risk of having irrational, incomplete or destructive ideas color one's perceptions unconsciously. That is what I am suggesting a preacher might do with theological/sociological/ethical ideas such as the ones discussed in chapters two and three. John Stott has said that preaching is bridge-building between two cultures. The preacher must relate the message of the gospel to the existential situation. (1) To do this task requires an understanding of both cultures. The culture of biblical times may be

examined in biblical studies. Our existential situation requires an understanding of unjust and violent structures, which the WCC may provide; it also requires some articulation of the way our faith may affect our action, which process theology may provide.

I have covered quite a bit of ground in the first three chapters of this project, and I cannot hope to discuss how all of the ideas presented could be interpreted in preaching. I have only prepared one sermon for illustration in this chapter, and much as I might have hoped it would be the be-all, end-all perfect sermon of all times and places, I could not include everything in one 20 minute talk. It should be understood that I would see the interpretation of ideas like these as a task that would undergird a career. Therefore, I will deal with them selectively. In the sermon itself, peace and justice were treated as a wholistic concept under the theological umbrella of the Kingdom of God. Particular ideas about God and human responsibility were also expounded. There will be further discussion of the purposes and planning behind the sermon later in this chapter.

Peace and justice are obviously social, political, and in their application, frequently controversial concepts. Perhaps the whole world would agree that having peace and justice would be a good idea. But controversy begins when discussion of how to achieve these begins. Most of us don't like controversy, especially if we are



ministers and our job security may depend upon having a happy congregation. This may make us reluctant to approach social issues from the pulpit. We may prefer to stick with safer, more "religious" topics, preaching on inner peace rather than nuclear disarmament, stewardship rather than a new international economic order, or communion rather than global community. But to ignore the social milieu is to ghettoize faith and secularize living. Merrill Abbey says of the contemporary secularist that "the secularist denial is not generally a blatant atheism so much as the contention that life organized around faith makes no crucial difference." (2) We must preach as though faith does make a crucial difference. Religion and politics cannot be separated because religion is "personal first and social always", in the words of Bishop Melvin Wheatley. Wheatley highlights two questions from God in the scripture that must be taken together: "Who are you/where are you?", which is the question of personal accountability; and "Where is your brother?", which is the question of personal accountability or identity achieved and fulfilled in the social context. (3) Christians do not exist in a vacuum. A relationship with God should not shut out the entire world outside ourselves.

If, then, the social context is a part of the identity of a person, a preacher who would minister to the whole person needs to address social or political issues. James Armstrong affirms that "politics is an essential province of Christian concern." (4) He does not advocate a

partisan church that "speaks ex-cathedra on every controversial issue that comes down the pike", but says that the church "is here to respond to issues on the basis of principles in the name and spirit of Christ." (5) The response cannot be simple repetition of stands the church has taken in the past or things the people of God have done before. If the world is changing, and if Christ is the "not-yet-realized transforming the givenness of the past from a burden into a potentiality for a new creation," (6) our Christian response must be fresh and appropriate to each historical moment.

Several scholars have suggested that the key to understanding what our predecessors in social-issue preaching, the prophets of the Old Testament, were doing was recognizing novelty in the way God was acting in the present. They had a new word of Yahweh to deliver. Von Rad names as one of the qualities the prophets had in common an intensive view into the future, which meant they could see the possibility for a new act of Yahweh even though they were rooted in the past sacral traditions. (7) Bright notes a trend in the development of prophecy in Israel in which true prophets moved from being nationalists or patriots in the early times to being able to see that God wouldn't necessarily protect Israel if the nation had been unfaithful. (8) Bruggeman characterizes the prophets' activity as cutting through a deadening and oppressive environment by proposing an alternative that is both criti-

cizing and energizing, and by using the language of hope and new life. They speak of a God who isn't contained by the empire but is free; thus they affirm the possibility of newness in Israel's life. "Prophetic ministry consists of offering an alternate perception of reality and letting people see their own history in the light of God's freedom and his will for justice." (9) James Sanders says that the difference between false and true prophets is the use of a correct hermeneutic, or way of interpreting past traditions. False prophets often applied good theology to the wrong time; the word they delivered was not appropriate to the present moment. The most important hermeneutic for the true prophets was radical monotheism. One must grant to God complete freedom to do whatever God wishes, even if it includes creating a completely new community through transformation of the people. (10)

All this is to say that, based on the tradition of the prophets, we can see that we need to be open to a new word from our God who is free and we need to be willing to proclaim that new word. We need to be ready for the possibility that our whole structure of existence may be ripe for change. We need to speak out on contemporary, dangerous issues boldly. Not to speak is to take a stand with the strongest or most conservative side.

This need not be cast entirely in a negative mood. Although change is often difficult or painful to face, we may be in an oppressive situation in which we long for the possibility of change. The situation we are in with the

nuclear balance of terror is a good example. Hans Van der Geest suggests that "the people hearing a sermon don't want merely protection against evil, they also yearn for evil to be overcome. This world here, this life, should become new, better, whole." (11) If a new word is offered, a perspective in which God may do something new and we may participate in that, hope becomes a realistic response. Van der Geest says of the congregation, "they yearn for deliverance because life's problems are insoluble, and at the end they're happy because this insolubility is called into question." (12)

Once we are convinced of the necessity for preaching on social or political issues, we must ask how this should be done. There are many theoretical approaches to preaching on social issues. In the following discussion I will simply summarize several of these approaches in order to show what issues are involved and the options that are available to adapt to the individual minister or congregation. It is important to choose an approach that will be appropriate for the biblical source and for the listeners; if the style is inappropriate, the message will be lost.

Morgan Edwards outlines three classical approaches to preaching ethics, which I see as the art of putting one's belief system into practice. The first is to allow ethics to grow out of the kerygma by offering biblical resources for why we want to do what we ought to do. This

means representing the life, death and resurrection of Jesus so vividly that people find new motives and resources for dealing with social issues. Edwards points to Bonhoeffer's idea of conforming with Christ as an example of this mode. The second approach is to highlight Jesus' particular relationship with persons. This is also called the agape' stance, and is represented by Brunner. In this the preacher interprets social responsibility out of a stance of unselfish love for others. This may take many forms as people encounter each other in their official societal roles. The third approach is to take the risk of translating agape' into specific directions for personal and institutional life. This approach affirms that no area of our life together can be declared off limits to faith and that specific stands and actions must be taken on social issues. Rauschenbusch is held up as an example of this; he believed it was the business of the preacher to call attention to structures that encouraged predatory practices on the poor and oppressed, with whom Jesus clearly sided. (13) Any or all of these approaches may be used by a preacher who believes preaching ethics is essential.

The United Presbyterian Church published a training manual for social ministries in 1980, which included a section on social preaching. (I am dependent on Bonita Benda's summary of this manual since I was unable to obtain a copy.) It mentioned three basic kinds of social preaching: preaching on social issues, stressing social values and virtue, and highlighting a social hermeneutic in

Biblical interpretation. All of these may occur in one sermon. The manual suggested, according to Benda, that "the ideal order of frequency would be use of a social hermeneutic most often and social issue preaching the least." (14) John Stott suggests that for approaching issues that may be controversial one needs to develop a Christian mind. This is:

a mind which has absorbed biblical truths and Christian presuppositions so thoroughly that it is able to view every issue from a Christian perspective and so reach a Christian judgement about it. (15)

Stott believes that it is part of the task of the preacher to help the members of the congregation develop such a Christian mind. Some doctrines must be proclaimed repeatedly so that the congregation will have a Christian perspective from which to view the world:

By our systematic exposition of the Bible over the years we should be giving our congregation a framework of truth. This will include such basic convictions as the reality and loving personality of the living God, the dignity of human beings by creation and their depravity by the fall, the pervasiveness of evil and the primacy of love, the victory and reign of Jesus Christ, the centrality of the new community in God's historical purpose, the transience of time and the certainty of the eschaton of judgement. (16)

The implication is that if the proper framework is laid down, the people will be able to act as true Christians.

Although this may not qualify as a separate approach, it is important to stick to the biblical record as closely as possible. James Armstrong instructs preachers to begin with the Bible. He says, "to preach the Bible is to loose its liberating power in those political, econo-

mic, cultural and personal domains where people function."

(17) The Bible is itself radical and will have social implications if its truth is told. Bishop Wheatley says that many of his references to social issues in sermons were "spin-offs"; that is, he would preach about something like the inclusiveness of God's love and then ask a question about the consequences of such a belief, spinning out applications from the theological statement. I found a good example of this in a story told by Clarence Jordan, author of the Cotton Patch Gospel. In this situation the author is talking to a businessman who is trying to decide whether or not to sell some lime for building to Jordan's community. He is afraid that a business relationship will leave him open to attack by disapproving neighbors.

He said, "Uh, I think maybe I can sell you that lime if you'll make a public statement that you folks no longer believe in integration, and have that statement printed in the Americus Times Recorder." That's our little daily paper.

I said, "Now, my dear friend, we didn't come in here to trade our souls. We came in here to buy lime. But, you got us wrong. We never have from the beginning said we believe in integration."

He said, "What you believe in?"

"All we've ever said is that God is no respecter of persons, that there's no white and black in the household of God."

"Good God A'mighty, that's integration, ain't it?"

"No sir, that isn't integration," I said. "That's the nature of God. And I don't see any point in us putting a little ad in the Americus paper that God ain't what he used to be. In the first place, I don't think God would even see it. He gets the Atlanta Journal. But assuming that He did see it, I don't think it'd make much impression on Him." (18)

Later in the story, Jordan says maybe it's time we just learned to live with God and cooperate with him. That is

what this biblically based social preaching is about, cooperating with God according to our best record of God's activity, the scriptures.

Methods such as these are very helpful in deciding how to take on an important social issue or how to interpret the Bible in a way that makes clear its implications for our social lives. But some scholars are convinced that it takes more than good method or preparation to make preaching on social justice issues effective. The sermon, no matter how well prepared, can not simply stand on its own merits; the context in which it is delivered and the person doing the speaking both have great impact on the sermon's effectiveness.

As we have already seen, a sermon must be appropriate for its audience. That is why careful selection of method is important. But in addition to that, the preacher should consider the unique qualities of the congregation that might affect the way a sermon is heard. Fred Craddock reminds us that a sermon is always completed at the ear of the listener, not at the mouth of the preacher. What transpires between mouth and ear may result in a complete misunderstanding of the message, as far as the preacher is concerned. One preacher has said, "I stand up there saying Blue, blue, blue, and they're out there thinking Yellow, yellow, yellow, and what they actually hear is Green, green, green!" This kind of re-interpretation of the sermon cannot be avoided completely, but I think it is possible for the preacher to minimize the



effects by being as keenly aware of the congregation as possible.

I found Alvin Porteous' book Preaching to Suburban Captives to be particularly helpful in this regard. He was addressing the question of how to preach about liberation to suburban captives, who are geographically and culturally isolated, economically privileged, and thus "susceptible to false myths about how the other half lives, while the pervasive ideology of consumerism seduces them into a shallow, inauthentic, materialistic life-style." (19) He does not characterize this so much as willful wrongdoing as a kind of captivity from which the people need to be liberated. The preacher must keep this awareness of the inner bondage of sin in tension with the outer bondage of oppression. The rich Christians in the world, though they may be oppressors in a global sense, must not be characterized as devils for they are in need of liberation, too. "The recognition of a universal human bondage not only relativizes the oppressor-oppressed duality but also affirms both the humanity and the redeemability of the oppressor." (20) Porteous points out another aspect of suburban oppression, that is, a sense of impotence in the face of our bureaucratic/technological society. As I have said before, I think process theology may provide liberation from this particular form of oppression with its view that our action makes an important difference in the world, and that novelty in the world is possible.

Of course there is more to understanding a congregation than this kind of technical/theological understanding of the position one's congregation might be in. The pastor must know the parishoners personally. James Armstrong provides a vivid illustration of this with a story about a friend of his who was the pastor of a rural congregation:

He had little formal training, but how he did love people. And they knew it. His preaching was a conversation with beloved friends. He laughed, fished, hunted, and wept with them through the days of the week; he shared their decisions, bore their burdens and suffered their humanity through the days of the week---and on Sunday, knowing and loving them as he did, he proclaimed the Word in ways that met them exactly where they were and drew them into the very presence of God. That's preaching! (21)

There is evidence that the personality of the preacher as well as the personality of the congregation will make a big difference in how a sermon with social implications will be received. Bonita Benda concluded after her research that "the most significant factor in determining the effectiveness of social justice preaching is the credibility of the preacher." (22) She discussed the credibility or ethos factor in three traditional categories: competence, character, and good will. I'm sure she can summarize her work better than I can re-word her summary, so I will quote her at some length:

Competence was identified by informants as perceived intelligence, knowledge, expertise at preaching, and the prestige of the preacher. Also included was the perceived authority of the resources used by the homilist, such as scripture, narratives, theological and secular materials, and the worship service itself. Even more significant, in terms of the data, was character, the perceived trustworthiness of the

preacher. This was defined in terms of personal integrity--practicing what was preached, genuineness, honesty, willingness to grow and struggle---and pastoral concern. The final findings related to good will, the perception of a positive attitude between the preacher and listeners. Informants mentioned such qualities as warmth, acceptance, openness, positive view of humanity, and a hopeful attitude. (23)

Benda used case studies of four ministers who had a good reputation for effective social justice preaching in her research. She drew vivid pictures of them that made it easy to see how their personal qualities and the way they spent their time in ministry underlined and emphasized their words. For example, one pastor had a reputation for never asking his congregation to do something that he wasn't already doing in his personal life. He spent much of his time visiting parishoners and greeted them warmly before and after the service. He used a great deal of narrative in his sermons, and also made liberal use of humor. The congregation liked the way he revealed himself and asked questions in his sermons so that it didn't look like he had all the answers or was above the struggle. Qualities held up in the other pastors included being very warm and loving and being a good counselor; giving a great deal of time in the worship service to the sharing of joys and concerns; being "approachable" and "steadfast"; being humble; being committed but not coming across as a zealot; having a vision of the wholeness of life; and other attributes, too numerous to mention. The context of the service as well as the personality of the minister clearly impacted the effectiveness of the preaching.

The issue here seems to be the minister's style. It may speak even louder than words can, according to Benda. In his book Integrative Preaching William Willimon also shows that the effectiveness of all preaching, including social or prophetic, is impacted by the way the pastor carries out all of his or her duties. Like Armstrong's friend, Willemon affirms that the most important concern for the pastor should be love for the parishoners. The preacher should not forget about caring for the congregation as persons while he/she prepares a prophetic sermon:

We do not lay aside our pastoral concerns when we assume the prophet's mantle. Such sensitivity is an excellent safeguard against the emotional coercion, moralistic scolding, and simplistic programs offered in so much so-called prophetic preaching. Day-to-day, first hand pastoral involvement with one's people does not so much soften one's prophetic preaching as inform and sharpen it. (24)

Willemon stresses a non-judgemental attitude in prophetic preaching. He says that the preacher should indicate that she/he is involved in the same ethical dilemmas so that the preaching is confessional and honest. The task of the prophetic preacher is not to condemn but to "help people see reality as it is. Once they do see it, then change is at last possible." (25) This is, I think, a good approach, and fits in well with what has been said in chapters two and three. The WCC conception of what will make for peace and justice is a vision of reality; the process perspective affirms that change is possible. The preacher, through clear, gentle, appropriate communication and authentic

lifestyle will help the people see it.

Besides these basic theoretical helps and explanations of social justice preaching, I found in my reading a great many assorted hints about "how to do it". Some of these are, I think, worth sharing. The best summary of these was quoted by Benda, from a lecture by Philip Wogaman:

Highlight the gospel not moralism, build on Biblical themes, support the prophetic with a pastoral ministry that affirms the value of persons, avoid direct attack of persons and reputations, research the facts of the issues, carefully state positions directly, support one's stances, use church pronouncements judiciously, give fair summary of the opposition, use human illustrations, expect people to change, point to constructive action, affirm a free pulpit, invite laity study, offer opportunity for feedback, and create an expectation of social ministry. (26)

Many of these same considerations came across in other books. Some that weren't included here were the use of humor; preaching in such a way that "everyone present feels included in the process of thought and conclusions"; (27) using a dialogic rather than a monologic style, so that people can think for themselves and will feel free to respond later; using very concrete images; building a sense of drama; and the use of "contraposition of themes of peril and promise, liberated life over against the threat of bondage and death." (28) Another idea, not exclusively related to social-justice preaching, that I found helpful was Bishop Wheatley's criteria of testing his own sermons:

1. Is it interesting?
2. Is it relevant?
3. Is it true?
  - a. Are all the facts correct?
  - b. Is it true to the gospel? e.g., Is the image

- of God presented faithful to the whole Bible  
and not just my "private chaplain"?
4. Is it practical? (29)

The questions of relevancy and practicality are particularly important tests for a sermon on social justice issues.

If I were to point to a particular approach I used in the preparation of my sermon, it would probably be a combination of two discussed above: using a social hermeneutic to interpret the bible, and trying to represent the kerygma in such a way as to help people find new resources to live and address social issues. I did not preach on a particular issue like peace but chose a rather visionary prophetic passage and tried to show how it might apply to our time. The chapter of Isaiah I preached on was chosen because it had within it some contrast between the current situation and the possible future and because it indicates a holistic vision of peace, justice and security. In addition, it addresses a problem that is very contemporary: complacency. I also chose a New Testament passage that specifically calls for action. (In other words, I stacked the deck.) I tried to use some of the other suggestions by the various writers. I used plenty of narrative and concrete imagery, as suggested by one of Benda's case study preachers. I tried to contrapose images of liberated life over against bondage, as suggested by Porteous. I used a little humor. I tried to build a sense of drama by asking a question early in the sermon and waiting some time before suggesting an answer. I tried not

to sound judgemental or as if I had all the answers (the latter was not too tough). Above all, I tried to indicate that God is working through us to inspire people to action.

Because there is evidence that the service surrounding the sermon has an impact on the effectiveness of the sermon, I am including here the liturgy used in the church service in which the sermon was initially preached. I am not including the pastoral prayer or the children's sermon because I did not do those things in the service and do not have a record of what was done. The liturgy follows the ordinary pattern of the church. I did not change the order of anything because I think it is important that people be comfortable in the service so that they can worship, so that they can listen. As School of Theology at Claremont professor John Olson says, it is best not to make people work too hard in church. Changes can be made in liturgy, but only slowly, by a long term pastor. I did use inclusive language to some extent, however. This congregation was not unfamiliar with it, and I tried not to be obnoxious or obtrusive about it.

## LITURGY

### PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP: O give thanks to the Lord, for God is good; God's steadfast love endures forever! Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom God has redeemed from trouble. Let them thank the Lord for the Lord's steadfast love, for God's wonderful works to people! For God satisfies the one who is thirsty, and the hungry God fills with good things. (Psalm 107:1, 2, 8, 9)

PROCESSIONAL HYMN: God of Grace and God of Glory

PRAYER OF CONFESSION: (adapted from a prayer by Sarah Chakko)

Lord, open our eyes that we may see our sins of omission and commission in the radiant light of our Savior, Jesus.

For our failure to see the wonder of the gift of life and the good things with which you have filled our lives; for our unending concern with things insignificant and our neglect of your values; for our destruction of true community by our tolerance of injustice, prejudice, and ignorance; for our disregard of the needs of others: Lord, forgive us!

TIME FOR SILENT MEDITATION

WORDS OF ASSURANCE: Listen to the word of God: "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Brothers and Sisters, our sins are forgiven!

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON: Isaiah 32

Behold, a king will reign in righteousness,  
and princes will rule in justice.  
Each will be like a hiding place from the wind,  
a covert from the tempest,  
like streams of water in a dry place,  
like the shade of a great rock in a weary land.  
Then the eyes of those who see will not be closed,  
and the ears of those who hear will hearken.  
The mind of the rash will have good judgement,  
and the tongue of the stammerers will speak readily  
and distinctly.  
The fool will no more be called noble,  
nor the knave said to be honorable.  
For the fool speaks folly,  
and his mind plots iniquity:  
to practice ungodliness,  
to utter error concerning the Lord,  
to leave the craving of the hungry unsatisfied,



and to deprive the thirsty of drink.  
The knaveries of the knave are evil;  
he devises wicked devices  
to ruin the poor with lying words,  
even when the plea of the needy is right.  
But he who is noble devises good things,  
and by noble things he stands.

Rise up, you women who are at ease, hear my voice;  
you complacent daughters, give ear to my speech.  
In little more than a year you will shudder, you complacent women;

for the vintage will fail, the fruit harvest will not come.

Tremble, you women who are at ease, shudder you complacent ones;

strip, and make yourselves bare, and gird sackcloth upon your loins.

Beat upon your breasts for the pleasant fields,  
for the fruitful vine,

for the soil of my people,  
growing up in thorns and briers;

yea, for all the joyous houses  
in the joyful city.

For the palace will be forsaken,  
the populous city deserted;

the hill and the watchtower  
will become dens forever,

a joy of wild asses,  
a pasture of flocks;

until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high,  
and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field,  
and the fruitful field is deemed a forest.

Then justice will dwell in the wilderness,  
and righteousness abide in the fruitful field.

And the effect of righteousness will be peace,  
and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever.

My people will abide in a peaceful habitation,  
in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.

And the forest will utterly go down,  
and the city will be utterly laid low.

Happy are you who sow beside all waters,  
who let the feet of the ox and ass range free.

NEW TESTAMENT LESSON: James 1: 22-25

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if any one is a hearer of the word and not a doer, that one is like a person who observes his or her natural face in a mirror; for she or he observes her or himself and goes away and at once forgets what he or she was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer that forgets but a doer that acts, that one shall be blessed in

doing.

CHORAL ANTHEM

CHILDREN'S SERMON

WELCOME AND PARISH CONCERNS

PASTORAL PRAYER AND THE LORD'S PRAYER

HYMN OF PREPARATION: Our God To Whom We Turn

SERMON: "Who Has Seen the Wind?"

OFFERTORY AND DOXOLOGY

PRAYER OF DEDICATION: Loving God, this is only a small return on the many blessings you have heaped upon us. In gratitude we offer you our gifts and ourselves. May this money be used to further the progress of justice and peace in the world, and may our service be used in the same way as we are ignited by the spirit of your love. Amen.

RECESSIONAL HYMN: Spirit by Jim Manley

CHORUS: Spirit, spirit of gentleness,  
Blow through the wilderness, calling and free  
Spirit, spirit of restlessness,  
Stir me from placidness, wind, wind on the sea.

You moved on the waters, You called to the deep,  
Then you coaxed up the mountains from the valleys of sleep;  
And over the eons, You called to each thing:  
Wake from your slumbers and rise on your wings.

CHORUS

You swept through the desert, You stung with the sand,  
And you goaded your people with a law and a land;  
And when they were blinded with their idols and lies,  
Then you spoke through your prophets to open their eyes.

CHORUS

You sang in a stable, You cried from a hill,  
Then you whispered in silence when the whole world was still;  
And down in the city you called once again,  
When you blew through your people on the rush of the wind.

CHORUS

You call from tomorrow, You break ancient schemes,  
From the bondage of sorrow the captives dream dreams;

Our women see visions, our men clear their eyes.  
With bold new decisions, your people arise.

CHORUS

BENEDICTION: May the spirit of God make you feel deeply  
God's great love for you, and and may that spirit move you  
to joy and service, today and forever.

SERMON: "Who has seen the wind?"  
Text: OT: Isaiah 32; NT: James 1:22-25

Well, where is it?

The spirit has come. It's recorded in the second chapter of Acts: "When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting...and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit." It's here, it's been here for a long time, so where's all the neat stuff Isaiah said was going to happen when the Spirit is poured down on us? The Wilderness becoming a fruitful field, and justice dwelling in the wilderness, and righteousness, and peace, and quietness, and trust forever, and security? Not to mention noble rulers using good judgement. Where are these things? [Dare I say--where's the beef?]

I think we'd recognize it if we were really living in this promised world. But what we see instead is injustice, insecurity, distrust, unrighteousness. We see, instead of a fruitful field, the desert growing in Africa and the forests being cut down for fuel. We see starving people being killed by police as they try to steal food they cannot buy. We see the elderly in the cities afraid to leave their homes after dark lest they be robbed or murdered. We see Mexican and Central American people risking their lives and leaving their families to come north to work and then being deported, often returning to

face death. We see innocent children being physically abused. We see governments spending staggering amounts of money on weapons that could destroy not just the human race but all life on the planet. We see government officials refusing to even negotiate with those they consider to be enemies. We, though no longer children, see monsters in the closet: what the WCC calls the military-industrial-bureaucratic-technological complex, which gains power and resources each day.

This is not the peaceable kingdom. Our world's peace is a balance of terror. This is not peace. Our justice is everybody getting what they deserve--as long as those in power get to decide what everyone deserves (one for you, five for me, one for you, seven for me...). This is not justice. Our doing the right thing is looking out for number one. This is not righteousness.

That's the easy part--saying that we know that this is not it, that the kingdom is not fully here. In a way it's harder to try to imagine what it would be like if it were here. It seems silly, it seems like wasting time, it seems like re-creating Oz somewhere over the rainbow. But if we as Christians believe that the kingdom of God is a real possibility, and not just a silly promise that God can't keep, then at some point we need to start imagining what it would look like. We have to think of it as more than pie in the sky--we have to see it as pie on the table, that all of God's children will share in. But before we begin visioning the kingdom, let me put in a

little aside. Some of this may sound like I think people can do enough good works to make the kingdom come. There was a time in our history as a church when some of our leading theologians believed that to be true. However, that kind of thinking leaves out the prime actor in bringing about the kingdom of God--that is, God. It is clear in the Bible that God is the only one that can usher in the kingdom. We are not perfect enough to do it; our perspective on the world is limited, our ability to make everything just right is limited. We will never attain perfection in this world. Suprised? Probably not.

This does not mean, though, that we are powerless to do anything. Just because we cannot reach perfection it does not follow that we can't attempt anything. Just imagine what would get done in this world if people waited until they were perfect at some task before trying it--absolutely nothing! We can have a vision of perfection which we keep our sights on while we do what we can. That is why we need practice envisioning the kingdom--so we have something to guide us as we try to do God's will. And when we act according to our best ideas about what God's kingdom would be like, we keep the future open for the kingdom and become signs of its coming.

I used to be in a support group that explored personal growth by asking, "If you had a magic wand and could change anything about yourself that you wanted, what would it be?" What about it? If you were the one in

charge of drawing up the blueprints for the kingdom of God, what would you change in our world today?

Let's look at some specifics that call for change first. I want to start by sharing a Korean parable with you that I heard at the Asilomar Missions conference last summer. This story describes "han", which means the suffering of the people. A long time ago the rulers of the Korean nation, seeking a way to protect the nation, decided to build a bell whose perfect tone would ward off enemy attack. The bell was built by the best artisans in the country but its tone was not perfect. A council was called of the princes and military leaders and intellectuals to decide what to do. The leaders agreed that the tone would be perfect if the purest, most beautiful girl in the land were sacrificed in the fire that melted the metal to be cast in the bell. A nationwide search was begun. After many weeks of looking, some soldiers found the purest, most beautiful girl in the very poorest part of the country. She was out playing with her mother. The soldiers took her and left her screaming, weeping mother behind--because no sacrifice is too great to make for national security. The girl was burned in the fire as planned, and the bell was cast. But when they finally rang the bell, instead of the perfect tone they expected out of the bell came the sound of the little girl crying: Emolay, emolay, emolay. In Korean that means Mother, Mother, Mother. That cry illustrates the suffering, the travail of the people, who are expendable in an oppressive system. I think the story

may well capture the sighs and groans of millions of people today.

How will this be different in the kingdom? The dignity and worth of each person would be respected and protected. No one's life and livelihood would be sacrificed in the name of national security, because in the peaceable kingdom there would be no insecurity. Military power would not be determining the shape of people's lives. The suffering of the poor would be relieved.

Another story: A woman in the United States, while not suffering from lack of money, suffers from lack of meaning in her life. Personal tragedy has been a part of her story for years. She marries while she is quite young and moves from her father's house to her husband's. She gives birth to a daughter, and then, wanting more children, has four babies who are stillborn. Finally, she and her husband are blessed with a living daughter but only four months later, her husband is killed in a plane crash. She is left to raise her girls alone. By this time she has suffered so much that her goal in shaping her children is to make them tough so that they will be able to survive. At the supermarket one day, a friendly man approaches the woman and her 3 year old daughter and says that the child is the most beautiful little girl he has ever seen. The little girl does as her mother has instructed her if a stranger approaches her: she screams and hits and kicks the man. "I had to teach her not to trust anybody," says the



mother, "in case she got in trouble while I was not there." The woman is growing older and her girls, now teenagers, are rebelling against her and she cannot afford to support her aging mother as she would like to. And she wonders if there will ever be time for her just to be herself.

How will this be different in the kingdom? Children won't have to be raised to be tough and defensive. The people will live in quietness and trust forever, Isaiah says. Instead of building walls of defence, we will be building the bridges of reconciliation. People will care for each other; there will be no struggling to make it alone. There will be time to rest, time to be ourselves.

Another Story: In the LA. Times this week there was a story about the embarrassment of the South African government because they couldn't find a nice place to house some black diplomats in the capitol city. They had promised to put them in a housing complex for the well-to-do but the residents protested because of their color. One resident was quoted as saying,

"We don't want to seem like racists, but 15 African families in one block is just too many and really changes...the complexion of the place...We have substantial investments in our houses here, and we don't want to see these diminished."

Another resident was worried about the diplomats' children taking over the neighborhood and making it unsafe for their own children. The country's laws usually exempt non-Caucasian envoys from housing segregation laws, making them, in effect, honorary whites.

How will this be different in the kingdom? All

persons would be valued as God's precious children, regardless of the circumstances of their birth or their race. Legal structures would not condone and even enforce the devaluation of any class of creatures.

Another story: In Columbia the son of a farm laborer--a squatter on a rich man's estate, where people work and live like slaves, and eat mud in the winter to survive, and die of it--this youth said, in answer to a question about how he experiences God, "God is the friend of generals and bishops, and he dines with the landowner." Allan Boesak, telling this story, goes on to say, "In his experience God belonged with the rich, with violence, with the 'church'. In his experience, they were all the same...It seems that to many throughout history God has all too often appeared in the garb of the rich and the privileged, standing on the side of the authorities and without protest abiding by all the untruths, the half-truths, and the equivocating myths."

How will this be different in the kingdom? Instead of people concluding because of their oppression and poverty that God is on the side of the rich ruling class, the rulers will be on the side of God. Isaiah says, "a king will reign in righteousness, princes will rule in justice, each will be...like streams of water in a dry place, like the shade of a great rock in a weary land." In other words, leaders will protect, not exploit, and will be open to God's will. Of course, in the kingdom there will

be queens and princesses as well!

It would be nice, wouldn't it? To be living in some of these conditions that might characterize the kingdom of God: good rulers, international security and peace, the end of unnecessary suffering, rest, reconciliation. I think if we took a poll, most people would rather live in the peaceable kingdom than in their present situation. I don't think we would be opposed to the kingdom coming. [Let's take a quick straw vote: how many want to take up residence in the kingdom of God? Opposed? Did you see that, God?]

So we're back to the original question: why isn't it here?

Well--let me try out an answer to that. You've heard the phrase "God works in a mysterious way." You've also heard of St. Paul's distinction between the wisdom of the world and God's wisdom, which may seem foolish to those in the world. Apparently God did not buy that little bit of worldly wisdom, "If you want something done right, do it yourself!" God's wisdom instead is to choose us to do God's work. You and me. Now that's mysterious.

I like the way Annie Dillard put it in her book, Holy the Firm. She says:

Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? Who shall stand in [God's] holy place? There is no one but us. There is no one to send,...only us,...our children busy and troubled, and we ourselves unfit, not yet ready, having each of us chosen wrongly, made a false start, failed, yielded to impulse and the tangled comfort of pleasures, and grown exhausted, unable to seek the thread, weak, and involved. But there is no one but us. There never has been. (p. 56-57)

Tag, we're it! God isn't going to erase everything and establish the kingdom by godself. Or if that is going to happen, it seems clear that we are not supposed to just sit around and wait for it. We are given lives for a purpose; we are to use them to do God's will, which according to this and other passages in the scripture means working for justice and peace and trust and reconciliation and fruitful fields.

James reminds us of this very thing in the NT reading for today. "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if any one is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like one who looks at their face in the mirror, and then immediately goes away and forgets what they look like." We look into the mirror of scripture, or into the mirror of God's love, and realize that we are the ones God has sent, and then go away and forget about it.

One of the problems Isaiah was dealing with, that may well apply to us, was complacency. He said, "Rise up, you women who are at ease, hear my voice; you complacent daughters, give ear to my speech." I guess this is where those of us who are in favor of inclusive language for all the good promises of God that are usually addressed to men get ours. But I think this may apply equally to both sexes...The complacency Isaiah was talking about meant that these women were lulled into a sense of false security. They thought nothing was wrong and they could just go on

living the way they were. They were unconcerned about the trouble Isaiah had been warning them against. In those days, it was the threat of being conquered by Assyria. In these days it might be running out of oil and of land suitable for farming; or pollution heating up the atmosphere and making permanent changes in climate that could melt the ice caps; or the threat of a hungry and oppressed nation building a nuclear weapon and holding the world hostage; or the possibility of a thermonuclear war. These are the dangers the prophets are warning us against now.

I can't help thinking of an old "Peanuts" cartoon. Charlie Brown is suffering from a stomach ache because the team never wins. Lucy and Violet tell him his stomach ache would go away if he wouldn't worry so much. He should take their approach: they don't care if they win or lose. They walk away singing, La de dah, win or lose, we don't care, La de dah! Charlie Brown says, "Now my stomach really hurts!"

When you think about it, God has blessed us with a great deal. Our sins are continuously forgiven, we are redeemed, and we have the opportunity to communicate God's love to the rest of the world. Don't you think it hurts God, makes God's stomach hurt, when we take a La de dah attitude about problems outside of our own families and circle of friends?

You are probably wondering when I'm going to get around to making some connection with the title of this

sermon, Who has seen the wind? That comes from a poem that was a favorite of mine as a child. It was written by Christina Rossetti, and it goes like this:

Who has seen the wind? Neither I nor you;  
But when the leaves hang trembling, the wind is passing thro'.  
Who had seen the wind? Neither you nor I;  
But when the trees bow down their heads, the wind is passing by.

The Holy Spirit is often spoken of in terms of the breath of God or the wind, like in the mighty wind of Acts 2. We can't see the Spirit any more than we can see the wind. We can only see the effects of the spirit as God's love enters people's souls and moves them to loving action. Allan Boesak tells us what happens to people when the Spirit takes possession of them:

They begin to move. The stagnation and silence are broken through. Contentment with sin becomes unacceptable; discontent with wrong comes alive. The Spirit unerringly unmasks our complacency with evil and his word tears our hypocrisy to shreds. Religious nostalgia and other-worldly sighs give way to zest for the future, and strength is received for the search for repentance, the renewal of humankind and our world. (p. 41)

The Spirit has come. We need to move. We need to recognize evil in the world, repent of our la de dah attitude, and begin to participate in God's work of loving. We need to do our part to envision and to create the justice and peace and righteousness and trust that are the signs of God's reign.

Who has seen God's Spirit? Neither I nor you;  
But when justice is sought, the Spirit is passing thro'.  
Who has seen God's Spirit? Neither you nor I;  
But where love and peace are real, the Spirit is passing by.

## EVALUATION

The evaluative instrument used was not created for this project but borrowed from a preaching course at STC. I have 49 evaluations from the church, at which I was formerly employed as a student intern minister. I was employed there for only 3 or 4 months, but went back for occasional visits so by the time I preached this sermon there I had known the congregation for about a year and a half. Still, I would not qualify as a long-term pastor such as those Benda studied. The graph of all the responses can be found on the following page. My delivery of this sermon was rushed and nervous, and the evaluations reflect this. The response to the content was clearly more positive than the other categories. Part of the positive response may have been due to the congregation comparing this sermon to some earlier ones and reacting positively to signs of improvement. Some of the extra written comments remarked on the too-fast pace; on the lack of movement, gestures, and changes in facial and voice expression; on the lack of personal illustration. On the positive side, the congregation appreciated the imagery, the stories, the presentation of the kingdom of God, and the relevance to today's problems.

I had 6 evaluations from the School of Theology, including three preaching professors, two current students, and a clergy graduate. The response is not markedly different. One factor that makes a comparison a little

# Church Congregation

## PREACHING

FS/JRJ-1

Dee Eisenhower  
(student)

Nov. 9, 1984  
(date)

	Very Good	Good	Average	Poor
<b>1. <u>Voice and Diction</u></b>				
Range and Quality	●●●●	●●●●	(●●)	( )
Speech Patterns	●●●●	●●●●	(●●)	( )
Strong and Vigorous	●●●●	●●●●	(●●)	( )
Natural	●●●●	●●●●	(●●)	( )
<b>2. <u>Delivery</u></b>				
Pulpit Presence	●●●●	●●●●	(●●)	( )
Posture and Gestures	●●●●	●●●●	(●●)	( )
Eye Contact	●●●●	●●●●	(●)	( )
Use of Notes	●●●●	●●●●	(●●)	( )
<b>3. <u>Oral Style</u></b>				
Oral, not Written Style	●●●●	●●●●	(●●)	( )
Terse and Concise	●●●●	●●●●	(●●)	( )
Clear and Plain	●●●●	●●●●	(●●)	( )
Inclusive Imagery	●●●●	●●●●	(●●)	( )
<b>4. <u>Structure</u></b>				
Movement	●●●●	●●●●	(●●)	(●) (physical)
Illustrations	●●●●	●●●●	( )	( )
Introduction	●●●●	●●●●	(●●)	( )
Conclusion	●●●●	●●●●	(●●)	( )
<b>5. <u>Content</u></b>				
Proclaimed the Gospel	●●●●	●●●●	(●●)	( )
Faithful to Text	●●●●	●●●●	(●●)	(●)
Creative and Imaginative	●●●●	●●●●	(●)	( )
Relevant to Today's World	●●●●	●●●●	( )	( )
Impact and Response	●●●●	●●●●	(●)	( )

Your sermon was strong in \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Suggestions for Strengthening \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_



Dee Eisenhower  
(student)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(date)

	Very Good	Good	Average	Poor
<b>1. <u>Voice and Diction</u></b>				
Range and Quality	(..)	(..)	(.)	( )
Speech Patterns	(.)	(.)	( )	( )
Strong and Vigorous	(.)	(.)	(.)	( )
Natural	(..)	(..)	( )	( )
<b>2. <u>Delivery</u></b>				
Pulpit Presence	(..)	(..)	( )	( )
Posture and Gestures	(.)	(..)	(.)	( )
Eye Contact	(..)	( )	( )	( )
Use of Notes	(..)	(.)	( )	( )
<b>3. <u>Oral Style</u></b>				
Oral, not Written Style	(..)	(..)	( )	( )
Terse and Concise	(..)	(.)	( )	( )
Clear and Plain	(..)	(.)	( )	( )
Inclusive Imagery	(..)	( )	( )	( )
<b>4. <u>Structure</u></b>				
Movement	(..)	(.)	( )	( )
Illustrations	(..)	( )	( )	( )
Introduction	(..)	(.)	( )	( )
Conclusion	(..)	( )	( )	( )
<b>5. <u>Content</u></b>				
Proclaimed the Gospel	(..)	( )	( )	( )
Faithful to Text	(..)	( )	( )	( )
Creative and Imaginative	(..)	( )	( )	( )
Relevant to Today's World	(..)	( )	( )	( )
Impact and Response	(..)	(.)	( )	( )

Your sermon was strong in \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Suggestions for Strengthening \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

difficult is that the seminary audience felt free to mark between the parentheses and the congregation did not (because I forgot to tell them it was ok). Still, one can remark on trends. My delivery was a little better the second time, as the evaluations show. The seminary congregations gave higher marks in structure. This may be due to the fact that they knew what they were looking for and had more to compare this sermon with than the church congregation would. The response to content was slightly more favorable, too. This may be due to the recognition of some theological concepts and appreciation of the way they were handled. The written comments included remarks on pace (still too fast); trying to say too much in one sermon; a few grammatical errors; and not enough sense of the spirit empowering people to act as well as inspiring them. On the positive side, they commented on my understanding of the kingdom of God and God; on the illustrations; on the use of humor; on the fact that it was interesting; and on its relevance. It is interesting to note that the highest evaluation came from the professor who knew the most about what I was trying to accomplish.

My own evaluation is similar to my congregations'. I thought the sermon was pretty good, but could have been improved in several ways. One, obviously, is in delivery. I could have practiced a little more than I did. I thought the sermon could have used more humor and light-heartedness. The sentences could have been simpler. I should

have included more practical, specific suggestions on possible action. Had it been my church, I might have had more information available on some issues or an evening workshop, as Wheatley suggested. I would have liked to be more specific about justice and peace, but since one cannot accomplish everything in one week, I would like to make this a sermon series or a recurring theme.

### CONCLUSIONS

Bringing the word of God to a congregation each week is an awe some task. It is a frightening task. It is an exhilarating task. We cannot always hope to do it well. But I think we can always try to do it well, even working around time limitations. This is a part of the minister's job that must be taken with utmost seriousness.

Part of what we can do is to be prepared. I don't mean just having a pretty good idea of what we're going to say when we step up into the pulpit, but being generally prepared to understand the world around us. We should be well informed on current events. We should be as informed as possible on the structures of the social order and how they operate. We should have some understanding of how we can impact the social system. This, as I have said before, is where I find the most value in the World Council of Churches work on peace and justice. They help us make connections within the framework of faith that we might not otherwise make. I have tried to show how this wholistic approach to social issues might be communicated in

preaching.

We can be prepared by spending time trying to articulate and understand our own theological ideas. What is it that we believe? How does that get communicated in our sermons? Is our theology up to date? That is, are the ideas we articulate still in tune with our actions and our perceptions? Or are they left over from an earlier era in our faith development? I have also tried to show how our theological structures of thought might impact the way a sermon is prepared.

We can be prepared to address our particular congregations. We can work to understand the context into which the words of the sermon will be delivered. We can get to know the members of the local church and let them get to know us. We can be prepared to avoid shocking people with a message they may not be ready to hear. This kind of preparation has been the main focus of the final chapter.

We can also be prepared spiritually to listen to God. This might be the most difficult thing of all in a busy schedule. But it should be, I think, a priority. If we believe that God is still alive and active, working through living beings, we have to be prepared to listen for new direction from our Creator. We must be able to listen for it in ourselves as well as practice discerning God's action in the world.

Thus prepared, we can hope to truly speak the word God

would have the world hear.

## ENDNOTES

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3. Melvin E. Wheatley, Lecture, "Preaching on Social Issues," School of Theology at Claremont, October 8, 1984.
4. James Armstrong, The Urgent Now (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970) p. 114.
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6. John B. Cobb, Jr. Christ in a Pluralistic Age (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975) p. 59.
7. Gerhard von Rad, The Message of the Prophets (New York: Harper & Row, 1965)
8. John Bright, Jeremiah (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965)
9. Walter Bruggemann, The Prophetic Imagination (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978) p. 110.
10. James A. Sanders, "Hermeneutics in True and False Prophecy," in Coates & Long (eds.) Canon and Authority (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977)
11. Hans van der Geest, Presence in the Pulpit (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1971) p. 72.
12. Ibid., p. 78
13. K. Morgan Edwards, "Law and Gospel," School of Theology, at Claremont, September 19, 1984.
14. Bonita L. Benda, "The Silence is Broken: Preaching on Social Justice Issues" (Unpublished dissertation, Iliff School of Theology, 1983) p. 22.
15. Stott, p. 170
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17. James Armstrong, Telling Truth: The Foolishness of Preaching in a Real World (Waco: World Books, 1977) p. 35.

18. Clarence Jordan, and Bill Lane Doulos, Cotton Patch Parables of Liberation (Scottsdale: Harold Press, 1976) p. 47.
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20. Ibid., p. 18
21. Armstrong, Telling Truth, p. 68.
22. Benda, abstract.
23. Ibid.
24. William H. Willemon, Integrative Preaching (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981) p. 83.
25. Ibid., p. 85
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28. Porteous, p. 63.
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## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

I find it a bit difficult to write any conclusions to the whole project because the connections between the chapters are not immediately apparent except as they relate to my interest in the topics I have discussed. This project is the last thing I will be doing at the School of Theology, and I see, on reflection, how it has addressed several questions I came to seminary with. Perhaps it would be fruitful to look at some of those questions and how the materials in this project relate to them.

One of the ongoing faith issues for me is the question, once I have acknowledged that one of the things I am called to do is to love my neighbor, of who my neighbor is. One of the things at STC that has affected me deeply is the school's interest in global consciousness. To me this emphasis says that we are called to know and love even those neighbors we don't see. We are also called to love the earth as a neighbor of sorts, a neighbor on which our lives are dependant and which has value apart from its usefulness to us. One of the things we must learn is who our neighbors are, how we may be oppressing them, how we may love them through our service. We must, in other words, try to understand the world beyond our own backyards because we are not isolated from each other but depend upon each other for our lives, whether we want to acknowledge it



or not. It is in this regard that I find the ecumenical literature very helpful. The fact that it is produced through the intermingling of Christians from all over the world makes its perspective much broader than mine, and because it is a Christian organization, its ethical interests tend to be similar to mine. These Christians, too, are exploring who our neighbors are and what their needs are. Their pastoral concerns can challenge me to develop a more holistic perspective and lifestyle.

The fact that I understand the big picture better as a result of my reading of the ecumenical literature on peace and justice does not mean that I will not still address local interests or needs. It may very well be my part in the pursuit of peace and justice to campaign for cutting the U.S. defense budget or to work for better and more frequent negotiations between the superpowers. But my more informed view of how the arms issue is related to other structures in the world may change my approach or may help me to encourage others to struggle for justice in the world. My solutions will not be so simplistic and my concerns will not be so selfish. My lifestyle may become more integrated as I become more cognizant of the interrelatedness of those issues or structures that affect all of us.

I have also addressed some deep-seated religious questions since I have been at seminary. I have long been aware that some things I observe in the world do not fit into the theology I have been taught. Some of these incon-

gruities came out in my third chapter. This is why I have lately been "tasting" process theology and finding it so delicious. It answers some of the questions I have had on issues that I found represented in the WCC material. The WCC is in many ways representative of the orthodox/normative theology with which I have been familiar. It was very interesting for me to look at some theological issues and compare the two perspectives. I find much in process theology attractive: a God who is love, and persuasive love being the most powerful force in the universe; the responsibility for and effectiveness of human action; the possibility of novelty even amidst deeply entrenched systems of injustice; the attribution of intrinsic value to the creation; the acknowledgement of truth in perspectives different from ours and the affirmation that we have something to learn from each other; and most of all, the hope inspired by the whole system of thought. For me, a sound, sensible, hopeful theological perspective provides the motivation to continue seeking a peaceful and just world. It provides a context of meaningfulness to what I will do in an effort to love my neighbors.

Now at the end of my seminary education I am theoretically prepared to be a minister. In a recent interview I was asked what I would hope to accomplish in my role of minister to a church. I answered that I would like to help the people to be the church; to be the Body, arms, legs, hands, feet, eyes, mouth of Christ in the world; to

love and serve God according to their gifts and abilities; to know and love and serve their neighbors, and to care for the earth. It is, then, part of my responsibility as leader and servant of the church to share this holistic and hopeful vision as one I have benefited from and hope that it will help others become more effective members of the Body of Christ. Preaching is one, though not the only way to share it. May God grant me the courage to speak boldly about God's love for all beings, God's will for justice and peace, and our responsibility to act with God to create a world in which all are cared for as God's precious children.

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